

REVOLUTIONARY SUBJECTIVITY IN THE THOUGHT OF KARL MARX

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Abstract

This dissertation demonstrates several theses in relation to key components of Marx's philosophy that conventional interpretations either misrepresent or overlook. The chief thesis concerns his idea of revolutionary subjectivity which is demonstrably inconsistent and undertheorized. The main areas of Marx's work that are explored to elucidate this idea are his ontology and method, philosophical anthropology, idea of "communist society," and theory of history. Insight into these and other aspects of his work can be derived through analysis of a tradition of social philosophy which has its origins in ancient Hellenic thought. Marx's strongest inspiration from this period came from the philosophy of Aristotle, whose work profoundly influenced his understanding of human development and his idea of "free" life-activity and relations. A key component of this tradition is the ontological idea that "reason governs the world." Marx sublated the form that it took in Hegel's philosophy. Inspired by Hegel's idea that "reason" is 'at work' in human history through a process of "estrangement," Marx claimed that the capitalist mode of production is instrumental in the development of the productive forces and the "integral development" of the revolutionary working class. According to Marx the creation of revolutionary subjectivity takes place through "estrangement" and "revolutionary practice." On his premises, such developmentally self-transformative life-activity is indispensable for the development of the capacities required for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and reorganization of social life. And yet he also claimed that the life-activity of working people in capitalist society has a tendency to ruin them physically and mentally. An accurate representation of this problem at the heart of Marx's idea of revolutionary subjectivity—and thus of this idea itself—requires an emphasis on his sensitivity to the subjective-mental dimension of human life (his incipient psychology and theory of "mind") and the development of individual 'ethical' capacities in particular. This dissertation concludes by rearticulating elements of Marx's thought about "estrangement" and human subjectivity with Husserlian phenomenology and Freudian psychoanalysis (including some of Melanie Klein's revisions of it) so as to establish a fruitful starting point for sublating Marx's social philosophy.

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Introduction

“All this nonsense. Digression.”

- Marx¹

1. The Problem

Marx's idea of revolutionary subjectivity has not received the attention that it deserves from scholars and interpreters of his work.² Joseph McCarney was one of the relatively few exceptions and he thought that the identification of the revolutionary subject is a “crisis” facing Marxism.³ There is indeed a problem with Marx's idea of revolutionary subjectivity, although it is not simply “the absence of this subject as Marx conceived it,” as McCarney claimed.⁴ After all, we might be short sighted and “this subject” may still appear. The real problem arises from the inconsistency inherent in Marx's idea itself.

Marx thought that he had comprehended the immanent realization of freedom in the world. In his own words, he was interested in “comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole,” i.e., the “historical movement going on under our very eyes.”⁵ From his perspective an integral part of this process is the genesis of an emancipatory form of individuality capable of

¹ Marx 1973, 273.

² As Guido Starosta claimed, “it could be argued that not many works have explicitly put the problematic of *revolutionary subjectivity* at the center of the critique of political economy” (Starosta 2005, 162). See Chapter Five for critical remarks on Starosta's interpretation.

³ “The fundamental thesis of Marx's social theory,” he claimed, “is that capitalism contains within it the emergent structures of the rational form of society which is socialism. The emergence of socialism depends on the agency of a subject which must, within Marx's theoretical framework, be a social class. He identifies the revolutionary class as the proletariat of the most advanced capitalist countries of his time. Against this background the immediate source of the present crisis has to be seen as the failure of that class to play its historical role” (McCarney 1990, 163).

⁴ McCarney 1990, 180. Elsewhere he claims that Marx failed to correctly identify the revolutionary subject because of “the undeveloped state of the object of analysis,” i.e., “it has yet to reach maturity” (McCarney 1991, 31).

⁵ Marx 2010, 77, 80.

initiating the creation of a “free” society and he claimed to see its incipient development and gradual organization into a social movement of the revolutionary working class.⁶ According to him, *Capital* is a “critical analysis of the actual facts” of capitalist society—and yet his idea of the development of revolutionary subjectivity was left undertheorized and inconsistent.⁷ His idea is especially undermined by his own account of the conditions of life in capitalist society which he depicts as largely detrimental for human development.

Marx maintained that working class life ruins the “body” and “mind” of the individual worker, but he also thought that these conditions are instrumental in the development of the capacities required for revolution. In his view, the fundamental life-activity of working people in capitalist society, including the struggles that inevitably arise from it, would compel us to engage in activity that shapes us into revolutionary subjects. He did not think that it was his task to bring guidance to the masses from above, as though he simply discovered who embodies revolutionary subjectivity and what the content of their revolutionary action must be. In other words, he did not seek to *make* the working class revolutionary. He claimed to recognize that the fundamental social life-activity of the proletariat takes the form of “estrangement” in capitalism and compels them to engage in “revolutionary activity,” i.e., activity in which “the changing of oneself coincides with the changing of circumstances.”⁸ The seeds for the overthrow of the capitalist

⁶ In 1845 Marx thought many of these subjects had already begun to blossom in relatively advanced capitalist countries. He claimed that “a large part of the English and French proletariat is already *conscious* of its historic task and is constantly working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity” (Marx 1975b, 37).

⁷ Marx 1976, 99. A key reason why *Capital* remained unfinished was because the revolutionary social transformation that he thought was happening had not ripened. Engels commented on this matter in his description of Marx’s plan for the third volume of *Capital* and the state of the manuscripts: “For the final chapter there is only the beginning. The intention here was to present the three great classes of developed capitalist society (landowners, capitalists and wage-labourers)...as well as the class struggle that is necessarily given with their very existence, as the actually present result of the capitalist period. Marx liked to leave conclusions of this kind for the final editing, shortly before printing, when the latest historical events would supply him, with unflinching regularity, with illustrations of his theoretical arguments, as topical as anyone could desire” (Marx 1981, 97).

⁸ Marx and Engels 1998, 230.

order are sown within its own soil because “it provides for an unprecedented expansion of the productive forces of social labour and to the universal development of every individual producer.”⁹

The “communist proletarians who revolutionise society,” Marx claimed, “put the relations of production and the forms of intercourse on a new basis—i.e., on themselves as new people.”¹⁰ For him, revolutionary subjectivity amounts to a set of developed “mental” and “practical” capacities, including more specifically productive powers and ethical capabilities required to appropriate the productive forces created by capitalism, recognize all human beings as inherently ends-in-themselves, and *initiate* the reorientation of our social life-activity with the aim of providing everyone with the requirements for a “free” life. However, comprehending Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity and providing a concrete account of it beyond this relatively abstract definition requires close examination of other key elements of his thinking. For this reason it will be discussed after exploring his ontology and ‘dialectical method’, his philosophical anthropology, his vision of “communist society,” and his understanding of the historical process of human development. Other fundamental components of his social philosophy will be elucidated in the process. This dissertation concludes by exploring potential pathways for the sublation of Marx’s work into a social philosophy which, on his premises, more adequately addresses the intensifying social and political struggles of the present that resonate with his revolutionary theory.

⁹ Marx 1975c, 293.

¹⁰ Marx and Engels 1998, 230

2. Chapter Summaries

The focus of the first chapter is on Marx's ontology and "dialectical method." A key component of this is his critical appropriation of the ultimate ontological premise of a tradition beginning with ancient Hellenic thought¹¹ and sublated by Hegel; namely, that "Reason directs the world."¹² In this view "reason" is the "substance" of the natural universe and as "rational" subjects ("self-conscious reason") we can become conscious of it in the form of "universal" laws.¹³ For Marx "dialectic" signified a 'scientific method' (or mode of thought) *and* an ontological concept. His "dialectical method" can thus be conceived of in accordance with what Hegel described as the "business of science": "to make conscious" the "work which is accomplished by the reason of the thing itself."¹⁴ The work of this kind of 'scientist' is akin the "critic" who, according to Marx, can comprehend "true actuality" in "the forms *inherent* in an existing actuality," which in the case of human society takes the form of a "critical analysis of the actual facts" of social life-activity.¹⁵ This is a vital aspect of his "dialectical" critique of political economy and the capitalist mode of production in *Capital*. He thought that essential features of our activity in capitalism display the work of "reason" in an 'unreasonable form' because it is instrumental in the development of "the productive forces of social labour" and "the integral development of every individual producer" which are preconditions for a "rational form" of society.¹⁶ An indispensable aspect of Marx's "dialectical method" was thus the comprehension of the "positive in the negative," which is a feature of what in Hegelian

¹¹ In Marx's view this ancient tradition began with Pre-Socratic thinkers and reached its highest point with Aristotle.

¹² Hegel 1956, 25.

¹³ Marx, for example, mentioned "the constant tendency and law of development" (Marx 1976, 1025).

¹⁴ Hegel 1991, 60.

¹⁵ Marx 1967, 213; Marx 1976, 99.

¹⁶ Marx 1976, 173.

terminology is a “speculative” (or “positively rational”) form of thought. The “speculative” is habitually treated as one of the key features of Hegel’s thought that Marx decisively discarded after his ‘materialist turn’—encouraged, perhaps, by Marx’s excessive criticism of Hegel’s “dialectical method”—and yet, within the context of Marx’s work as a whole, his re-emphasis of the ‘dialectical negativity’ inherent in “what exists” also involves the idea that there is a discernable tendency for “a higher socioeconomic formation” to emerge.¹⁷

The second chapter is devoted to an exploration of Marx’s idea of our “nature”—“*universal human nature*”—understood in the Aristotelian sense as what we are when fully developed, which according to Marx is “free.”¹⁸ By describing us as a “universal” being and identifying us with the activity of “mind,” he essentially defined humanity as “self-conscious reason.” We are “free” when we are able to know “how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object,” i.e., to actualize the “universal” (which is “reason”) in all aspects of our life-practice, whereby we achieve self-determination.¹⁹ The “human being” is the “universally developed individual” who pursues the comprehensive development of their “essential powers.”²⁰ Attention will also be given to Marx’s idea that a fundamental impetus for the development of our “nature” arises through our struggle to satisfy “natural necessity” via the social labour process. The struggle to live (and live well) leads us to alter not only the world

¹⁷ Marx 1981, 911.

¹⁸ Marx 1967, 118.

¹⁹ Marx 1964, 114. According to Hegel, “if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not.... I am free on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself” (Hegel 1956, 17). Likewise, Marx thought that a “*being* only regards himself as independent...when he owes his *existence* to himself” (Marx 1967, 312).

²⁰ Marx 1964, 176. Marx did not elaborately and systematically define these “powers”—e.g., as Aristotle did with his categorization of virtues (i.e., “moral” and “intellectual”) and further specification (“courage,” “wisdom,” etc.)—but substantial claims about human “species powers” are made throughout his writing nevertheless; e.g., his relatively cursory notes about the “human nature of the senses” which are not just “the five senses” but also include “the so-called spiritual and moral senses” (Marx 1967, 309).

which we inhabit but ourselves as well. Even though our “essential” character, as expressed through our life-activity, is such that its expression changes throughout the transitions between varying forms of what Marx termed the “ensemble of social relationships,” each character is a determinate gradation in our “universal” development nonetheless.²¹

The third chapter examines Marx’s philosophical understanding of the form of society required for the realization of “full human development.”²² His idea of the content of a “free” life in “communist society” is similar to Aristotle’s idea of “eudemonia,” i.e., a life of “living and faring well” arising from the practice of “complete virtue.”²³ The “social rationality” he envisioned is dependent on a social mode of life produced and reproduced by “universally developed individuals.”²⁴ Marx’s idea of “justice” also conveys the influence Aristotle’s philosophy. It involves the practice of “complete virtue” in our relations with others²⁵ and is itself a virtue (a kind of “moral virtuosity”) because it requires acting in accordance with a “universal” ethical principle. The realization of “justice” in this sense is necessary, according to him, for the proper functioning of a “communist” organization of social life which is an end-in-itself. In such a society we could all achieve “rational” self-determination because as “associated producers” we would consciously provide ourselves with what we need to develop “universally”; i.e., the material means for a life oriented toward the “absolute movement” of the development of our “species powers” would be provided by everyone for everyone: “From each according to

²¹ Marx 1967, 402.

²² Marx 1976, 533.

²³ Aristotle 1998, 15. Aristotle’s idea of virtue is “activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle,” i.e., “reason,” and evidence indicates that Marx was inspired by it (Ibid., 13).

²⁴ Marx 1992, 390.

²⁵ In a more intimate form the “just” relations within which all activity takes place in “communist society” becomes what Aristotle described as true “friendship”: the reciprocal and mutually recognized practice of “complete virtue.”

[their] ability, to each according to [their] needs.”²⁶ The practice of “justice” is integral for both realms of life-activity that Marx conceptually divided “communist society” into: the “realm of natural necessity” (which involves instrumental activity) and the “true realm of freedom” (which is devoted to activities that are ends-in-themselves). Marx claimed that instrumental labour would be done “rationally” for the sake of fully “free” end-in-itself activity and one of the key results of this is that it is minimized in order for us to spend as much time and energy in the “realm of freedom.” This realm involves the conscious actualization and enjoyment of “universal” intellectual and aesthetic principles (“the laws of beauty”) within relations that are “just” and mutually recognized to the fullest extent possible. In this way our life is composed of activities in which we exercise and further develop our “species powers.”

The fourth chapter explores vital philosophical components of Marx’s writing on history and the growth of “communist society” from within capitalism. Freedom is the *telos*²⁷ of the life of our species and in Marx’s view “reason” allegedly also governs our species’ developmental history. Inspired by Hegel, Marx thought “estrangement” in the labour process in particular illustrates the “dialectic of negativity” through which the “Reason” that “has always existed” attains its “rational form,” i.e., consciousness in “an advanced phase of communist society” when “the practical relations of everyday life between [individuals], and [humanity] and nature, generally present themselves to [us] in a transparent and rational form.”²⁸ There is substantial evidence which indicates that a key component of his perspective of our historical development

²⁶ Marx 2010c, 347. Marx’s call for the abolition of private property is significant not only because the functioning of “communist society” would require radically democratic control by the “associated producers” over the social means of production but also because in his view we would not want to exclude each other from the experience of our own “universal” good.

²⁷ Philosophical debates about Marx’s ‘teleological’ idea of humanity’s genesis will be addressed in this chapter.

²⁸ Marx 2010c, 347; Marx 1964, 177; Marx 1957, 213; Marx 1976, 173. Elements of Kant’s philosophy regarding our ability to discern a ‘rational’ movement in history will also be explored in this chapter.

is a sublation of Hegel's idea of the "cunning of reason." He evoked this concept in *Capital* in the midst of a discussion of specifically *human* activity—one of many instances throughout Marx's writings which indicate that in his view "reason" is always 'at work', whether it is in a conscious or 'unconscious' form. More specifically, in periods of "estrangement" (like the capitalist mode of production)—which is a necessary phase in our development from our initially animal condition, determined by instinct, to human beings, the pinnacle of nature and the sovereign being of the cosmos, determined by "self-conscious reason"—it is 'at work' in an irrational form. For Hegel, a key form of "estrangement" is the "passions" of "World-Historical Individuals" which are irrational motives that have world-historical consequences. In Marx's thought the "avarice" of the capitalist class plays an analogous role to the Hegelian "passions." This is evident in his more general idea of "the transitory necessity of the capitalist mode of production."²⁹ He claimed that the "historic destiny" of capitalism, its "great historic quality" achieved via its "unlimited mania for wealth" and "ceaseless striving towards" surplus value production, is that it

"creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one."³⁰

²⁹ Marx 1976, 739.

³⁰ Marx 1973, 325.

The capitalist mode of production is a form of human “estrangement” and Marx was unambiguous about his belief that it drives “towards its own suspension.”³¹ It does so primarily through the development of the productive forces of social labour as required for “communist society” and the emancipatory subjectivity that will initiate the creation of this new world.

Marx’s idea of the revolutionary subjectivity that will perform this “suspension” is the topic of the fifth chapter. He thought that our initial discontent and rebelliousness will lead to “revolutionary practice” which transforms us in such a way that we become able to establish the “first phase of communist society.” This requires that the “estranged” conditions of life in capitalism have also previously shaped the subjectivity of the working class for its leading role in this process. A key instance of this ‘education’ through “revolutionary practice” is the process of appropriating the knowledge objectified in the productive forces (which requires a certain degree of development of individual productive powers to begin with) because he thought the act of appropriation further develops the capacities required for it. In his view, a key aspect of the “integral development of every individual producer” is the development of a feeling of *indifference* toward the “particularity” of work insofar as we are receiving wages (although his writing does not suggest that every individual must be able to operate all of the forces of production in order to establish the “first phase of communist society”). This is a result of wage-labour “estrangement” in capitalism. He thought that in these conditions we are driven by “*greed*” for money which works in tandem with the essential features of the capitalist organization of the production process (‘deskilling’, etc.) to open up “the real sources of wealth,”

³¹ Ibid., 410. “The life of a people,” Hegel claimed, “ripens a certain fruit; its activity aims at the complete manifestation of the principle which it embodies. But this fruit does not fall back into the bosom of the people that produced and matured it; on the contrary, it becomes a poison-draught to it. That poison-draught it cannot let alone, for it has an insatiable thirst for it: the taste of the draught is its annihilation, though at the same time the rise of a new principle” (Hegel 1956, 78).

i.e. “general industriousness,” as it encourages us to move from occupation to occupation.³² Even if Marx’s idea of “integral development” seems unrealistic³³ it is nevertheless a fact that the working class already operates the social forces of production as a collectivity.

Marx depicts the ability to consciously unite in a way that facilitates radical democratic control of the production process as a fundamental factor in the success of a revolutionary movement.³⁴ Aside from the development of our productive capacities, the development of individual ethical capacities to the extent necessary for initiating the “first phase of communist society” is another key component of Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity. In his view the form of society which emerges initially would be “still stamped” with the morality “of the old society from whose womb it emerges,” although insofar as the initiation of a revolution for “communist society” is carried out consciously it requires the development of an incipient form of the desire for “justice.”³⁵ For instance, Marx evokes the idea of this development in his claim that working people experience a kind of “association” through “revolutionary practice” which leads to the development of a new, higher need of an ethical kind: “the need for society.”³⁶ His work indicates that overcoming the power structure of capitalism requires that we desire and are able to relate to each other on a more “just” level than the “estranged” relations characteristic of

³² Marx 1973, 224.

³³ There are other similar tendencies that can be seen in capitalism, although it is not clear that they have anything positive to offer to the process of human development. For example, Bill Morneau, the Finance Minister of Canada, has claimed that Canadians “should get used to so-called ‘job churn’—short-term employment and a number of career changes in a person’s life” (*Canadian Press* 2016).

³⁴ Cf. Marx’s claim that “It is the working [classes]...who have...laid down the real basis of a new society—modern industry, which transformed the destructive agencies of nature into the productive power of [humanity].... By creating the inexhaustible productive powers of modern industry they have fulfilled the first condition of the emancipation of labour. They have now to realize its other condition. They have to free those wealth-producing powers from the infamous shackles of monopoly, and subject them to the joint control of the producers.... The labouring masses have conquered nature; they now have to conquer [humanity]” (Marx 2010b, 278).

³⁵ Marx 2010c, 346.

³⁶ Marx 1964, 155.

the capitalist mode production, alongside the development of intellectual awareness about our essentially collective struggle and the necessary character of the collective solution.

Marx's idea of "revolutionary practice" is inconsistent with vanguardism and in fact precludes it. On his premises, to suggest otherwise would be to forget that "the educator himself must be educated."³⁷ He claims that the "proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority," and that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves."³⁸ Nevertheless, in his view—as is amply demonstrated by the record of his activity—this does not repudiate the importance of organizing ourselves through the creation of groups with revolutionary aims, participating in mass protest movements, engaging in 'educational' activities, or participating in the construction of a party apparatus to unify and clarify our interests and aims, influence state policy, and eventually attain state power. A typical vanguard-fallacy is the belief that it is possible to instill 'revolutionary consciousness' in the disgruntled and disaffected masses of oppressed people and provide them with organizational structure and leadership.³⁹ This belief is intimately related to another mistaken interpretation of Marx's thought: namely, that revolutionary subjectivity can be understood essentially as class-*consciousness*. This interpretation of Marx's idea of "the class-consciousness of the workers" is limited because he did not think of revolutionary subjectivity as a kind of awareness in a purely mental or intellectual sense; for Marx it also involves the 'embodiment' of the degree of "self-

³⁷ Marx 1967, 401

³⁸ Marx 2010, 78; Marx 2010c, 82.

³⁹ See, for instance, a typical vanguardist view in the following claims by Robert Brenner in the first issue of *Catalyst*: "the fact remains that, up to now, in most of the world, right-wing nationalist-cum-populist forces have been able to capitalize on the profound distress and disaffection of working people far more effectively than has the radical left"; the "question is whether a still embryonic radical left can develop the capacity to exploit the implicit and explicit opportunities that are certain to present themselves in the coming period" (Brenner 2017).

conscious reason” required for “revolutionary activity,” which requires a corresponding development of our ‘emotional’ and ‘sensual’ powers in order to carry it out in practice.⁴⁰ It is thus more accurate to think of revolutionary subjectivity in the context of the totality of an individual’s character, i.e., as a revolutionary orientation of the individual’s entire personality. In order for us to ‘consciously’ participate in the creation of “communist society” we must not only know but be able, through will and action, to do what is necessary for its existence. Ultimately, from Marx’s perspective, the experience of “estrangement” and “revolutionary practice” by working people in capitalist society is required to equip us with capacities which cannot be imparted by the guidance of a vanguard.

At this point a distinction must be made between the developmental processes associated with “estrangement” and “revolutionary practice” because Marx’s claims about the detrimental side of “estrangement” undermine his theory. In short, his idea that the capacities required to initiate the revolution develop through “estrangement” is inconsistent in the form that he left it because, according to him, it also has a marked tendency to ruin us physically and mentally. He claimed that “estrangement” stunts our development as “human” beings because it “mortifies [our] body and ruins [our] mind,” resulting in “ignorance” and “mental degradation.”⁴¹ As things have come to pass it does indeed appear that the severe exhaustion of the physical and mental energies of the working class is a widespread result of capitalist exploitation. Marx’s writing points out that “estrangement” is particularly detrimental for the development of revolutionary

⁴⁰ Marx 1967, 808. “The subject,” McCarney claimed, “has to be a centre not just of cognition but also of will and agency, a desirer and doer as well as a knower. Hence, its consciousness is both theoretical and practical and, moreover, is necessarily embodied in some determinate locus of activity in the world. A dialectical social theory must, after all, be specifically concerned with factors of social change and, for that and other reasons, with forms of human practice. It is in the light of these concerns that consciousness as such becomes significant.... Hence, if one may still speak of a dialectic of consciousness, it has to be understood as that of a practical, embodied consciousness” (McCarney 1990, 117-118).

⁴¹ Marx 1964, 110.

subjectivity because in his view we are deluded about our own activity and habituated to become treacherous creatures of the “cash nexus” driven by aggressive greed. It appears that Marx underestimated the extent to which the hostile nature of social relations in capitalism acts as a hindrance to revolutionary development and activity, and his work does not sufficiently address the question as to how we will overcome it through positively developmental “revolutionary practice.”

Capitalism is a society that increasingly leaves “no other nexus between [individuals] than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’”—and yet Marx thought that it “produces not only the alienation of the individual from himself and from others, but also the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities.”⁴² Our development therefore presents us with a tricky problem: according to Marx, individuals who experience these “alienated” relations in capitalism are nevertheless positioned to associate with each other in ways that foster the revolutionary “need for society.” If this need is going to develop at present in a revolutionary way it must do so in a world that appears to be increasingly motivated by envious competition and possessive individualism, rife with violence and authoritarianism in a myriad of forms, and decaying social conditions that are giving rise to reactionary movements worldwide.⁴³ The working class’ “need for society” requires a development of ethical capacities (or, in Aristotelian terms, “moral virtue”) but Marx did not elaborate, in a realistic and substantial way, how these capacities will develop amid the “alienated” relations that comprise a fundamental aspect of capitalist society.⁴⁴

⁴² Marx 2010, 70; Marx 1973, 162.

⁴³ Consider, for example, the problem posed by the “need for society” of the ‘Proud Boys’.

⁴⁴ As Hal Draper claimed, “Most of the problems of proletarian revolution stem from the massive role of divisions, disproportions, and disparities within the working classes, among its different sectors, and among its individuals. The process of overcoming these diversities and discords is a key part of the road to proletarian revolution. One

The idea of “estrangement” is closely connected to the problem of revolutionary subjectivity. The final chapter will explore a fruitful starting point for rearticulating “estrangement” and human subjectivity in Marx’s work with elements of Freudian psychoanalysis and Husserlian phenomenology.⁴⁵ From Marx’s perspective, “estrangement” is rooted not only in the world of our social life-activity but also in us, our “inner world.”⁴⁶ Human subjectivity was an essential element in Marx’s understanding of socio-economic phenomena (especially “estrangement”) and his work indicates that he had a sophisticated understanding of it even though he did not develop a robust theory of his own. In his view, life in capitalism is experienced differently by the subject who perceives it with “sober senses” compared to the subject with a “mystical consciousness” who experiences life in an illusory way. Thus he proposed that a serious inquiry into our subjectivity is worthwhile. He described the possibility of a “reform of consciousness” through “analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself,” but he was unable to achieve this in a substantial way because he did not develop (or have at hand) a rigorous psychological theory with which he could approach a ‘Historical Materialist’ analysis of the “perceptibly existing human psychology.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, his work contains an incipient psychology.⁴⁸

Marx described “estranged” social practices as being driven by our own powers which have become a power unto themselves, are hostile, and command us, whereby our own social mode of life-activity and history dominates us as individuals and collectively all at once. His

can view this process as one of maturation. Maturation has several sides (physical, intellectual, emotional, and so on) even in the simple case of an individual; so also in the case of a class, which is a more complex phenomenon” (Draper 1978, 52).

⁴⁵ Parallels between Marx’s thought and Husserl’s phenomenology are also explored in the first chapter.

⁴⁶ Marx 1964, 108.

⁴⁷ Marx 1967, 214; 1975, 302.

⁴⁸ To begin with we can consider, for example, his use of psychological terminology to describe the subjective basis of socio-economic life such as “mania,” “accursed hunger,” etc. (Marx 1973, 222).

writing indicates that from his perspective it is not enough to conceptualize this simply as a feature of the social nature of our essential life-activity—even though this is a key factor in his explanation for the phenomena of “estrangement”—because our “inner world” is involved in determining it. Consider, for example, Marx’s idea of “the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities.”⁴⁹ In *Capital* Marx summarizes our “estrangement” in the capitalist mode of production by claiming that our “own movement within society” has for us “the form of a movement made by things, and these things, far from being under [our] control, in fact control [us].”⁵⁰ His claim that the “social relation between men themselves” takes the “fantastic form of a relation between things” is a key instance of the “mystical consciousness” of “estrangement” in his writings.⁵¹ Of course, it is an ‘inverted consciousness’⁵² because it corresponds to actually ‘inverted’ social life-activity, but insofar as Marx thought that we live in conditions which “require illusions” he was implicating a decisive subjective component in the determination of this social life even though he did not extensively elaborate it.⁵³

Marx thought that when the “sensuous” product of labour becomes a commodity it “changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness.”⁵⁴ In doing so he equated a feature of our “social” activity with the “suprasensible.”⁵⁵ In his view we are ‘social animals’ but not simply gregarious *beasts*; on the contrary, we are an inherently “rational,” conscious being that

⁴⁹ Marx 1976, 165.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 167-8.

⁵¹ Ibid., 165.

⁵² This inversion is summed up in his claim that the “mysterious character of the commodity-form consists...simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things” (Ibid.).

⁵³ Marx 1967, 250.

⁵⁴ Marx 1976, 163.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 165.

experiences the world *intersubjectively*. Thus, in a word, on Marx's premises the realm of the "suprasensible" is located in "the human mind," even though 'commodity fetishism' is inextricably linked to a definite form of social life-activity.⁵⁶ Indeed, he claimed that the "objective conditions essential to the realization of labour are *alienated* from the worker," which is an 'objective' socio-historical process, but he also claimed that in this process they "become manifest as *fetishes* endowed with a will and a soul of their own."⁵⁷ His point, of course, was not that commodities actually have a "soul" of their own, and when he claimed that the capitalist's "soul is the soul of capital" he did not counter the inversion by simply claiming that there is no "soul."⁵⁸ Instead, his writing indicates that he thought mental-psychological processes are a fundamental basis for this inversion. In the case of the capitalist, for instance, they are "capital personified" because their "soul" is such that this definite form of life-activity satisfies an "inner necessity" of theirs (e.g., greed).⁵⁹ Insofar as it is our "soul" that is 'alienated' and projected onto capital in this way, "estrangement" in Marx's 'Historical Materialism' is a kind of 'psycho-social' phenomenon.

Marx claimed that capitalists are generally more "estranged" as a class⁶⁰ than working people, but the subjectivity of the working masses who habitually participate in the irrationality of everyday life-activity an integral part of the capitalist system. Even though he thought their "estrangement" is 'self-transcending', he also claimed that capitalism has the potential to break down all resistance to it. Indeed, substantial historical evidence indicates that in some

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1003.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 342.

⁵⁹ Marx 1967, 312. "Each tries to establish over the other an *alien power*, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need" (Marx 1964, 147).

⁶⁰ This is because, according to Marx, they find "absolute satisfaction" in the "process of alienation" associated with the capitalist mode of production (Marx 1976, 990).

circumstances working people can become reactionary instead of revolutionary (e.g., by turning against each other on the basis of various prejudiced attitudes, supporting fascism and other reactionary movements, etc.,) and Marx himself insinuated that there is a tendency to resist what he considered a “reform of consciousness.”⁶¹ The persistent tendency to become mired in “estrangement” and saturated in the various illusions that arise organically out of our conditions of life⁶²—which is a tendency that Marx was familiar with—underscores the need for a ‘Historical Materialist’ approach to comprehending social and political phenomena which adequately takes human subjectivity into consideration.

Insofar as the genesis of our ability to overcome our bondage to each other and “natural necessity” is a crucial feature of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’, the development of the power of our “mind” is as well. There is a relatively common tendency for people writing about Marx’s thought to interpret ‘Historical Materialism’ as a social theory which essentially treats the “mind” (and by extension any idea of psychological subjectivity) as epiphenomena.⁶³ At the basis of this is a ‘materialist’ ontology which is inconsistent with Marx’s thought. The significance of overcoming *this* ‘materialism’ is illustrated by the work of those who have recognized the role of “mind” (and psychological subjectivity) in Marx’s ‘Historical

⁶¹ Cf. Schiller’s claim that “it must be something in men’s psyche that obstructs the acceptance of truth, even when it is so vividly convincing” (Schiller 2016, 27).

⁶² In such circumstances we tend to take our activity and relations (e.g., competition, exchange, exploitation, etc.) for granted, typically because our lives leave us too desperate, weakened and demoralized to do anything about it. Consider, for instance, the “incredible amount of pressure” that Amazon puts on its workers “to work faster and faster,” a practice which they go along with because of “the fear of being ‘written up’ and losing their jobs, which will thrust them into other low-paid jobs with fewer benefits” (Semuels 2018). As one worker put it: “The constant trying to chase your rate [of productivity], trying to stay ahead of being written up—it affects you psychologically.” Another worker claimed that “what makes people not want to quit” Amazon is “the pay”: “People say, ‘You can treat me any type of way, since this is the best money we can get out here in Moreno Valley’” (Ibid.).

⁶³ Psychological theories are key components of social theory in the philosophical tradition that Marx is rooted in (cf. Plato’s *Republic*). Consider, for instance, Marx’s idea of “universally developed individuals” who are virtuous individuals *à la* the philosophy of Aristotle who claimed that “by human virtue we mean not that of the body but that of the soul; and happiness also we call an activity of soul” (Aristotle 1998, 25). Aristotle claimed further that “if this is so, clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about the soul” (Ibid.).

Materialism’ and tried to bring it into conversation with Freud’s work. While it can be demonstrated that Freudian psychoanalysis has marked consistencies with the incipient psychology in Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’, these attempts ultimately come up short if they remain uncritical of the ‘materialist’ premises of Freud’s theory which are insufficient for the concept of “mind” found in Marx’s work, and thus also inattentive to the philosophical premises upon which Marx’s idea of “mind” rests.

In Freud’s early essay titled “Project for a Scientific Psychology” he claimed that his “intention” was “to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction.”⁶⁴ Views like this are typical of the natural sciences founded on the materialism of Newtonian physics which, as Alfred North Whitehead put it, conceives of “nature as composed of permanent things, namely bits of matter, moving about in space which is otherwise empty,” in which the “connections between such bits of matter consists purely of spatial relations.”⁶⁵ Whitehead maintained that it is impossible to interweave the concepts of “Life” and “Mind” within this “general concept of nature” because the locomotion “of matter involves change in spatial relationship” and “nothing more than that.”⁶⁶ Freud left his “Project” unfinished⁶⁷ but he did not fully cast aside the ‘materialist’ foundations of natural science and his “metapsychology”

⁶⁴ Freud 1966, 295.

⁶⁵ *Modes of Thought*, 128. “We assume,” Freud wrote, “that mental life is the function of an apparatus to which we ascribe the characteristics of being extended in space and of being made up of several portions” (Freud 1966, 13).

⁶⁶ Whitehead 1968, 129, 132. “Matter involves nothing more than spatiality, and the passive support of qualifications. It can be qualified, and it must be qualified. But qualification is a bare fact, which is just itself. This is the grand doctrine of nature as a self-sufficient, meaningless complex of facts. It is the doctrine of the autonomy of physical science” (Whitehead 1968, 132).

⁶⁷ As his work progressed he attempted to take account of “the subtleties which were being brought to light by ‘psychological analysis’ and which could only be accounted for in the language of mental processes” (Freud 1991, 163). At that point he thought that the “physical characteristics” of “latent states of mental life” are “totally inaccessible to us: no physiological concept or chemical process can give us any notion of their nature” (Ibid., 169).

ultimately remained beset with an antithesis. At the end of his life he described psychoanalytic psychology as “a natural science like any other,” and according to him the “processes with which it is concerned” are akin to “those dealt with by other sciences” such as “chemistry or physics.”⁶⁸ His work indicates that even until that point his “metapsychology” was still part of the same general ‘materialism’ in which nature is ultimately composed of “dead” matter in strictly determined motion; consider, for example, his view that our innate “instincts” (i.e., the “somatic demands upon the mind,” including the physical-chemical processes associated with such bodily impulses) “are the ultimate cause of all activity.”⁶⁹ Freud was thus unable to *consistently* maintain that we can potentially direct ourselves intelligently and live freely because his philosophical anthropology rests on the ontological premises of a mechanistic ‘materialism’ which precludes a coherent conception of self-determination and the life of “mind.”

Examples of work which failed to sufficiently distinguish Freud’s perspective from Marx’s in this way can be drawn from various well-established attempts at synthesising their thought (e.g., the work of Wilhelm Reich⁷⁰ and members of the Frankfurt School). Erich Fromm’s

⁶⁸ Freud 1969, 30.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁰ In *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*, Reich maintained that he does “not accept a certain ‘materialist’ conception of psychology widespread in Marxist circles,” i.e., “the concept of mechanistic materialism” (Reich 2012, 11). Ultimately, however, he never overcame this “materialism” in his own appropriation of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory. In the first (1929) edition of this work he claimed that if a psychology “is to deserve the right to be called a materialistic psychology,” it “has to be clear about whether psychological activity can be viewed as a metaphysical fact—i.e., a fact outside the organic world—or as a secondary function bound up with the organic world” (*Ibid.*, 13). And in the second (1934) edition, he wrote: “Sexual economy, if it wants to become a proper scientific discipline, must study the sexual process in all its functions, psychical as well as physiological, biological as well as social, and must equally investigate all the functions of the basic law of sexuality; thus it is faced with the difficult task of deducing sexual-psychical functions from sexual-biological functions. In this task it is assisted by the dialectical method which it consciously employs. We may put forward the following principle: it is certainly true that the psychical is the product of the organic and must consequently follow the same laws as the organic; but at the same time, it is the opposite of the organic, and in that function, it develops a set of laws which are its own and peculiar to itself. Only the study of these latter laws has been the task of psychoanalysis; and in the main, this task has been completed. Sexual economy may be expected to solve the problem of this relationship between physical and psychological functions; whether it does so depends on conditions outside our control” (*Ibid.*).

“analytic social psychology” attempted to take account of (and to some extent develop) the idea of mind (and psyche) in Marx⁷¹ but he could not have achieved a suitable synthesis for “the use of psychoanalysis within historical materialism” from the outset because, according to him, the “method and function of a psychoanalytic social psychology” is “that of classical Freudian psychoanalysis as applied to social phenomena.”⁷²

The final chapter will draw on Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy and psychology because his writings contain ideas of human subjectivity and experience which are consistent with the philosophical premises of Marx’s incipient psychology.⁷³ “Psychology failed,” Husserl claimed, because “it let its task and method be set according to the model of natural science or according to the guiding idea of modern philosophy as objective and thus concrete universal science.”⁷⁴ Freudian psychoanalysis would fit in this general description. According to Husserl,

“Phenomenology frees us from the old objectivistic ideal of the scientific system, the theoretical form of mathematical science, and frees us accordingly from the idea of

⁷¹ Fromm maintained that Marx had an incipient psychology—“a *dynamic psychology*”—although he missed the mark with his claim that “Marx never meant” for “the ‘economic’ factor” to be “understood to refer to a psychological, subjective motive” (Fromm 1970, 64). He also mistakenly claimed that “Historical materialism is not at all a *psychological* theory” because “Economy in this context refers *not to a psychic drive, but to the mode of production*; not to a *subjective psychological* but to an *objective socio-economic* factor” (Fromm 1962, 38). On the contrary, Marx was sensitive to the subjective (and even “psychological”) determinations of economic life; e.g., the indispensable role of greed in animating certain economic behaviour and the objectification of knowledge in the productive forces. Nevertheless, it is true that Marx lacked “a satisfactory psychology” (Fromm 1970, 155). Indeed, as Norman Brown maintained, where “a psychology of human needs should be, there is in Marxism a great gap” (Brown 1959, 250).

⁷² Fromm 1970, 157, 162. Other aspects of Fromm’s work will be explored in the final chapter.

⁷³ An accurate interpretation of this relationship requires a grasp of major elements of Marx’s philosophical thought which are discussed in the first and second chapters of this work. Husserl’s idea of “intentionality” and its usefulness for articulating the idea of experience associated with Marx’s method of “science” is explored in the first chapter as well. It is worth noting that Husserl locates his phenomenology within essentially the same tradition as Marx’s thinking is rooted: “Phenomenological philosophy regards itself in its whole method as a pure outcome of methodical intentions which already animated Greek philosophy from its beginnings; above all, however, [it continues] the still vital intentions which reach, in the two lines of rationalism and empiricism, from Descartes through Kant and German idealism into our confused present day” (Husserl 1999, 335).

⁷⁴ Husserl 1970, 203.

an ontology of the soul which could be analogous to physics.⁷⁵ Only blindness to the transcendental, as it is experientiable and knowable only through phenomenological reduction,⁷⁶ makes the revival of physicalism in our time possible.”⁷⁷

While various theorists have attempted to bring Marx’s thought into conversation with Freud’s, not enough attention has been given to the Kleinian version of psychoanalysis in this regard. The final chapter will draw connections between the philosophy of ‘Historical Materialism’ and Melanie Klein’s interventions in the psychoanalytic tradition.⁷⁸ Even though her psychoanalytic theory shares the same fundamental flaws as Freud’s initial version in relation to Marx’s thought, her revision of his theory is more compatible with the philosophical premises of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’, especially in relation to his idea of ethical life and experience. For Marx, “estrangement” is fundamentally “estrangement” from each other. The “mystical consciousness” of “estrangement” does not just involve the projection of subjective powers onto objects, but also the habitual objectification of other subjects.⁷⁹ Klein put forth an “object relations” perspective of psychological life with a psycho-social basis for “universal” ethical experience and activity that is amenable to the conceptual framework of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’. Ultimately, her work presents a psychology of social and political life

⁷⁵ “In no way,” Husserl maintained, “can a science of soul be modeled on natural science or seek methodical counsel from it” (Ibid., 223).

⁷⁶ That is, the “epoché.” Chapter One contains further discussion of this concept.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 265. Cf. Husserl 1970, 212.

⁷⁸ Fromm, incidentally, claimed that Klein’s “evidence and constructions have not been convincing in the opinion of most psychoanalysts, including myself” (Fromm 1970, 32).

⁷⁹ “When man confronts himself, he confronts the *other* man.... In fact, the proposition that man’s species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man’s essential nature. The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realized and expressed only in the relationship in which a man stands to other men. Hence within the relationship of estranged labor each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which he finds himself as a worker” (Marx 1964, 114-115).

which compliments a ‘Historical Materialist’ analysis of progressive-revolutionary and conservative-reactionary political movements and their corresponding ideologies, attitudes, etc.

3. A Confession

In the middle of an intimate conversation at a time when this thesis project was just a hazy idea of an amorphous plan for engaging with Marx’s philosophy, I found myself in the odd position of identifying as a ‘Marxist’, supporting the central philosophical and political tenets of Marx’s social theory, but simultaneously maintaining that his theory of revolutionary subjectivity—which, in my view, is a central (if not the most integral) component of his revolutionary theory—is inconsistent and full of gaps. In a way, this thesis has inadvertently become a recounting of the shedding of my ‘theoretical’ skin—a kind of *anámnesis*. It is not just an interpretation of Marx’s writings; it is intended to be a critical engagement with his thinking. I do not attempt to ‘solve’ the problem of revolutionary subjectivity. A “scientific” theory of this development can only be demonstrated through self-evidence which is both “theoretical and practical” (at which point the apparent opposition between theory and practice is sublated); in other words, the “soul” of the revolutionary subject cannot be known merely as an object in the world but fundamentally as the activity of a subject through our own collective participation in “revolutionary practice.”

At a Historical Materialism conference in Toronto (May 2016) I was asked why I bothered to investigate Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity “theoretically.” This question had never crossed my mind in any significant way until that moment. My interlocutor argued that the revolutionary subjects are created by “history” and that we do not need a theory because we/they just need to become revolutionary. Essentially, the question boiled down to why I even bothered to make it a ‘philosophical’ problem if Marx’s revolutionary social theory is ultimately about

‘changing the world’. I cannot recall how I responded but I remember wanting to say that we are driven to comprehend this ‘philosophically’ because of our “material and spiritual” struggles. The lives of working people around the globe are becoming more difficult and our suffering is increasing. We are ‘losing the class war’ and extreme right-wing reaction is on the rise worldwide—and as the average temperature of the Earth rises at an intensified rate, it appears that the “icy water of egotistical calculation” is only getting colder.⁸⁰

Marx claimed that humanity “inevitably sets itself on such tasks as it is able to solve.”⁸¹ Whether or not this is determined to be true, we cannot comprehend the solutions to the social problems and political conflicts that we face without comprehending *ourselves*, and if we seriously intend to achieve these aims we cannot avoid becoming involved in ‘philosophy’. As Whitehead claimed,

“Every epoch has its character determined by the way its populations re-act to the material events which they encounter. This reaction is determined by their basic beliefs—by their hopes, their fears, their judgments of what is worth while. They may rise to the greatness of an opportunity.... On the other hand, they may collapse before the perplexities confronting them. How they act depends partly on their courage, partly on their intellectual grasp. Philosophy is an attempt to clarify those fundamental beliefs which finally determine the emphasis of attention that lies at the base of character.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Marx 2010, 70.

⁸¹ Marx 1977, 21.

⁸² Whitehead 1967, 99.

This kind of ‘philosophical’ approach shares a similar spirit with what Marx called the “self-understanding”—or “*confession*”—“of the age concerning its struggles and wishes.”⁸³ In his opinion it is a “*task of history*” to “establish the *truth of this world*” and the immediate task of “*philosophy*” insofar as it “is in the service of history” is “to unmask human self-alienation.”⁸⁴ However, this dissertation indicates that Marx’s ‘philosophical’ approach is not—and indeed cannot be—oriented toward discovering ‘the truth’ for the world to merely “accept, pass on, and put into practice.”⁸⁵ Instead, its ethos is akin to the sentiment expressed in what Socrates said, while he stood on the threshold of the Cave, about those who are not aware of their chains:

“They’re like us.”

⁸³ Marx 1967, 215.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 251.

⁸⁵ Marx 2010c, 298.

Chapter One - Ontology and Method

“I am so far advanced that in five weeks I will be through with the whole economic shit. And that done, I will work over my Economics at home and throw myself into another science in the museum. I am beginning to tire of it.”

- Marx, 1851⁸⁶

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.

Believe me...”

- Marx, 1872⁸⁷

1. “At the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell...”

Marx never described his idea of the “dialectical method” in a substantial way. Nevertheless, through a close study of his work we are able to discern that he sublated Hegel’s idea of “dialectic” as the “higher movement of reason.”⁸⁸ Understood in this way, “dialectic” refers to a mode of thought and an ontology which is premised on the originally ancient Hellenic⁸⁹ idea that “Reason directs the world.”⁹⁰ Hegel was also situated in this philosophical tradition and Marx’s writings demonstrate that Hegel’s sublation of it into his own philosophy had a profound and enduring influence on Marx’s thought. For this reason Hegel’s writings are an invaluable source of further clarification for all key components of Marx’s method. His idea of “Reason” as both ‘substance and subject’ is foundational for what became known as Marx’s

⁸⁶ Quoted in McLellan 1973, 283.

⁸⁷ Marx 1976, 104.

⁸⁸ Hegel 1969, 105.

⁸⁹ When interpreting Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s “dialectical method” we must remember that they are both situated within this philosophical tradition, more of which will be discussed below.

⁹⁰ Hegel 1956, 12.

‘Historical Materialism’.⁹¹ Even though there is substantial evidence found throughout the span of Marx’s writing which indicates that he critically retheorized this idea, it nevertheless remains largely overlooked.⁹²

The fact that Marx sublated Hegel’s “dialectical method” is widely recognized by commentators on Marx’s thought but there remains great diversity among interpretations of his method. A commonly held view among commentators is that Marx abandoned the “speculative” aspect of Hegel’s method⁹³ along with his rejection of Absolute Idealism, and yet it is possible to discover substantial evidence in Marx’s writing which indicates that he retained the element of “speculative” thought. In comparison, the phenomenological character of Marx’s method is recognized more readily.

The key components of Marx’s “dialectical method” form a triad: this ontological idea that “Reason directs the world,” its phenomenological character, and his “speculative” thinking. The relationship between these main components will be explored alongside other related aspects of Marx’s thought and in the process it will be demonstrated, contrary to a prevalent interpretive tendency, that Marx’s method is not a kind of crude ‘materialist empiricism’. Evidence from Marx’s ‘mature’ writings which indicates that he did not abandon or profoundly alter the

⁹¹ While it may seem counterintuitive at first, this ontology precludes the idea that Marx’s ‘historical dialectic’ involves the application of some ‘fundamental laws of dialectics’ to human history so as to demonstrate the inevitability of Communism, as was proposed by Soviet ‘Diamat’. This and other related questions will be addressed in Chapter Four.

⁹² A notable exception is found in Ted Winslow’s paper “‘Internal relations’ and Marx’s ‘materialist conception of history’” (2015, *Capital & Class* 39, no. 1: 95-110).

⁹³ According to Hegel it consists in the comprehension of “the positive in the negative.” In his view it is “the most important aspect of dialectic” and “for thinking which is as yet unpractised and unfree it is the most difficult” (Hegel 1969, 56).

ontological and epistemological foundations of his method as his thought developed will be presented throughout this chapter.⁹⁴

2. Ancient Hellenic Philosophy and the “exploration of the rational”

Marx was initially exposed to the origins of the ontological idea that “Reason directs the World” in an ancient Hellenic tradition of philosophy that he studied in university. As Hegel claimed, it was Anaxagoras who “was the first to enunciate the doctrine that νοῦς...or Reason, governs the world.”⁹⁵ For Heraclitus, another notable progenitor of this tradition, “all things come to pass in accordance with” the “*logos*.”⁹⁶ According to Hegel, the ‘intelligent’ order of the cosmos is evident, for example, in the “movement of the solar system” which “takes place according to unchangeable laws” which are “Reason, implicit in the phenomena in question.”⁹⁷ Thus Hegel proposed that the “sole business of science is to make conscious” the “work which is accomplished by the reason of the thing itself.”⁹⁸ It is within this philosophic tradition that we should locate the ontological foundations of Marx’s assertion that “the ultimate aim” of *Capital* was “to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society,” one of “the natural laws of its

⁹⁴ If this goes unrecognized we risk making the mistake of interpreting his ‘mature’ critique of capitalism primarily as an attempt to expose the *transitory* character of the capitalist mode of production. Allen Wood, for instance, claimed that the “ultimate aim of Marx’s theory, of course, is to reveal the tendencies to change inherent in bourgeois society” (Wood 2004, 226). This view is not entirely correct because Marx emphasized the transitory character of capitalism insofar as he claimed to see the immanent development of a “higher” social form from within the social life-process of capitalism. Cf. McCarney’s claim that “what underlies Marx’s conception of the practical significance of his social theory is his allegiance to an idea of method derived ultimately from Hegel,” i.e., “the phenomenological dialectic,” and that “the central substantive insight of dialectics is” the “idea that behind the phenomenal forms of existing society there is a more rational order struggling to be born” (McCarney 1990, 114, 193).

⁹⁵ Hegel 1956, 11. Cf. Hegel 1969, 50 and Hegel 1968, 331-2, 339-40.

⁹⁶ Heraclitus 2001, 2.

⁹⁷ Hegel 1956, 11. “To consider something rationally,” Hegel claimed, “means not to bring reason to bear on the object from outside in order to work upon it, for the object is itself rational for itself; it is the spirit in its freedom, the highest apex of self-conscious reason, which here gives itself actuality and engenders itself as an existing world” (Hegel 1991, 60).

⁹⁸ Hegel 1991, 60. For him, of course, this is ultimately the process of “Spirit” or “Mind” becoming conscious of itself: “the aim of all genuine science is just this, that mind shall recognize itself in everything” (Hegel 1971, 1).

movement.”⁹⁹ On the one hand, the existence of social and political “science” of this sort entails that we can have real insight into our social life-process, enabling us to take conscious, collective, and ultimately “free” control of it; on the other hand, it also entails that we cannot “put forward fantastic solutions” to “social antagonisms” in the place of such knowledge.¹⁰⁰

Hegel emphasized that “we must clearly distinguish” between Anaxagoras’ principle and “intelligence as self-conscious Reason” and he claimed that it was Socrates who “adopted the doctrine of Anaxagoras” and radically transformed it, taking “the first step in comprehending the union of the Concrete with the Universal.”¹⁰¹ Socrates agreed with Anaxagoras that ‘Mind’ is a sovereign force in the world but he maintained that it was most truly active in the shared consciousness of human beings; hence the sentiment attributed to him by Plato that “I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me—only the people in the city can do that.”¹⁰² Marx thought that this tradition (and the philosophy of Hellenic antiquity in general) reached its zenith with Aristotle¹⁰³ for whom the “function” of humanity “is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle,” i.e., “*logos*.”¹⁰⁴ This tradition is thus

⁹⁹ Marx 1976, 92.

¹⁰⁰ Marx 2010c, 298.

¹⁰¹ Hegel 1956, 12-13. As A.E. Taylor put it, “Mind, said Anaxagoras, is the cause of all natural law and order, just as mind is the cause of the orderliness and coherence of human action. To Socrates this suggested that the universe at large is the embodiment, like a properly conducted human life, of coherent rational plan” (Taylor 1952, 64).

¹⁰² Plato 1997, 510. Cf. Marx’s claim that “Feuerbach’s aphorisms seem to me incorrect only in one respect, that he refers too much to nature and too little to politics. That, however, is the only alliance by which present-day philosophy can become truth” (Marx 1975d, 400).

¹⁰³ Hegel maintained that “With Anaxagoras a light, if still a weak one, begins to dawn, because the understanding is now recognized as the principle. Aristotle says of Anaxagoras: ‘But he who said that reason (*nous*), in what lives as also in nature, is the origin of the world and of all order, is like a sober man as compared with those who came before and spoke at random’” (Hegel 1968, 319).

¹⁰⁴ Aristotle 1998, 13.

foundational for Marx's philosophical anthropology insofar as he conceived of the human "species being" as "a *universal* and therefore a free being."¹⁰⁵

Aside from his direct study of ancient Hellenic philosophy, Marx was also exposed to this tradition in a renewed form through his studies of German philosophy, especially in the writings of Hegel. The idea of "Reason" underwent further development in Hegel's philosophy and he articulated it as

"*Substance*, as well as *Infinite Power*; its own *Infinite Material* underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form,—that which sets this Material in motion. On the one hand, Reason is the *substance* of the Universe; viz. that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. On the other hand, it is the *Infinite Energy* of the Universe.... It is *the infinite complex of things*, their entire Essence and Truth. It is its own material which it commits to its own Active Energy to work up; not needing, as finite action does, the conditions of an external material of given means from which it may obtain its support, and the objects of its activity. It supplies its own nourishment and is the object of its own operations. While it is exclusively its own basis of existence, and absolute final aim, it is also the energising power realising this aim; developing it not only in the phenomena of the Natural, but also of the Spiritual Universe—the History of the World. That this 'Idea' or 'Reason' is the True, *the Eternal*, the

¹⁰⁵ Marx 1964, 112. Cf. Aristotle's view that "reason more than anything else *is* [humanity]" and Hegel's claim that "the *universal*" which unites all of humanity, "man as man," is "mind" (Aristotle 1998, 226; Hegel 1971, 1).

absolutely *powerful* essence...is the thesis which...has been proved in Philosophy.”¹⁰⁶

Textual evidence indicates that Hegel’s idea of “reason” as “the substance of the Universe” had a profound influence on Marx in his formative years and that he “received the inner call *to comprehend*,” as Hegel put it, whereby he came to “recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present” which enabled him “to delight” in it.¹⁰⁷ His writings also indicate that this philosophical orientation influenced his revolutionary disposition. In May 1843, he wrote to Arnold Ruge: “You will not say that I value the present time too highly. And if I do not despair, it is only the desperate situation of the present that fills me with hope.”¹⁰⁸ Another letter to Ruge from September 1843 suggests that this disposition of Marx’s was directly associated with what Hegel termed the “rational insight” and “*reconciliation* with actuality” that “philosophy” granted Marx’s “inner” calling.¹⁰⁹ Marx wrote that “Reason has always existed, but not always in rational form. The critic, therefore, can start with any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop the true actuality out of the forms *inherent* in existing actuality as its ought-to-be and goal.”¹¹⁰ *Capital* indicates that he sublated this into his ‘mature’ theory and “scientific” critique of capitalism and political economy, in which he attempted to “make conscious” the “work” of “reason” which is “implicit in the phenomena” of life in capitalist society. Hegel’s idea of “*reconciliation*” was for Marx an inherently revolutionary one.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel 1956, 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ Hegel 1991, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Marx 1967, 210.

¹⁰⁹ Hegel 1991, 22.

¹¹⁰ Marx 1967, 213.

Sean Sayers associates the Young Hegelian “critical approach,” i.e., the “utopian and subjective wishful thinking” that abandoned the “scientific attitude of studying what is,” with Marx’s idea of the activity of the “critic” in 1843.¹¹¹ While Sayers is justified in defining “subjective wishful thinking” as utopian, it is mistaken to associate this with Marx’s position in 1843 because, based on the philosophical premises which are evident in his writing at the time, Marx thought “reason” is “what *is*.” Thus Marx’s position in 1843 does not entail that “the world is judged and criticised in light of how it ought to be,” as Sayers maintains.¹¹² Insofar as Marx critically appropriated the Hegelian principle that “philosophy is *exploration of the rational*,” his revolutionary social theory is “for that very reason the *comprehension of the present and actual*, not the setting up of a *world beyond* which exists” only “in the errors of a one-sided and empty ratiocination.”¹¹³ This idea is expressed in the manuscripts posthumously published as *The German Ideology* in which Marx and Engels wrote that “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.”¹¹⁴ In this way, Marx took up what Hegel described as the “task of philosophy,” i.e., to “comprehend *what is*” because “*what is* is reason.”¹¹⁵ This principle was vital for Marx’s idea of the relationship between theory

¹¹¹ Sayers 1987, 153.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hegel 1991, 20. McCarney claimed that Marx was concerned with “what Hegel calls ‘surrender to the life of the object’, and the thinking of that life in systematic, discursive form” (McCarney 2000, 67). In recent literature, Caligaris and Starosta maintain that what “is rational in Hegel’s dialectic” is “its method of immanent development of the life of the subject-matter” (Caligaris and Starosta 2014, 67). Cf. Starosta 2015, 62.

¹¹⁴ Marx and Engels 1998, 57.

¹¹⁵ Hegel 1991, 21. Hegel states further that if “theory does indeed transcend [its] own time, if it builds itself a world *as it ought to be*, then it certainly has an existence, but only within...opinions, a pliant medium in which the imagination can construct anything it pleases” (Ibid., 22). It follows that since every philosophy “is a philosophy of its time,” it “provides satisfaction only for those interests which are appropriate to their time” (Hegel 1968, 106). “Socrates,” for example, “did not grow like a mushroom out of the earth, for he stands in continuity with his time” (Hegel 1968, 384). It is evident that Marx also held a similar position. He maintained that “philosophers do not spring up like mushrooms out of the ground; they are products of their time, of their nation, whose most subtle, valuable and invisible juices flow in the ideas of philosophy” (Marx 1975d, 195).

and practice. For him, a genuinely “scientific” theory of “communism” depicts it as it “emerges” from the “womb” of capitalist society, unlike the fanciful imagination of ‘utopian’ reformers who have not attained sufficient insight into their contemporary circumstances and instead make fantastic plans for the future.¹¹⁶

3. “Dialectic” as the Onto-Methodological “higher movement of reason”

One of Marx’s most well-known statements on the “dialectical method” can be found in the 1873 afterword to *Capital* where he wrote that it is a process of “inquiry” whereby we “appropriate the material in detail,” “analyse its different forms of development” and “track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully...the life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas.”¹¹⁷ The onto-methodological nature of “dialectic” is difficult to discern from only this passage, although it can be pieced together from this and other sources in the writing of Marx and clarified with the aid of Hegel’s work. It is important to stress the ontological aspect of Marx’s idea of “dialectic” because of the increasingly common tendency to treat it simply as if it were a mere theoretical tool.¹¹⁸ Bertell Ollman, for instance, has placed an excessive emphasis on the methodological aspect of “dialectic” in Marx’s thought; e.g.,

¹¹⁶ Marx 2010, 346. Contrary to Guido Starosta’s claim that “Marx’s materialist dialectical science entailed the transcendence of *all* philosophy,” Marx remained ‘philosophical’ in this sense (Starosta 2016, 52). Starosta argues that Marx abandoned “the abstract character of idealist philosophy as present in” Hegel because “the very essence of philosophy” is “to be indifferent to the real movement of human practice. Within the limits of philosophical thought, no real mediation is possible between theory and practice,” and “the relation between theory and practice cannot but become inverted” (Ibid., 14). However, the standpoint of philosophy according to Hegel as outlined above is not inconsistent with the fact that Marx turned “his attention on the way human life is materially produced” (Ibid., 15). It is rather a necessary ontological foundation for the kind of “science” characteristic of Marx’s ‘materialist’ “dialectical method.”

¹¹⁷ Marx 1976, 102.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Hegel 1969, 56. A typical example can be found in Arthur Schipper’s review of *Dialectics in World Politics* in which he describes “dialectics” as consisting of “a highly intuitive set of methodological tools,” a “sophisticated theoretical machinery,” and “a step-by-step method for applying this machinery” (Schipper 2016).

“dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world.”¹¹⁹ Ironically, this view omits the “full range” of Marx’s idea of “dialectic” because it ignores its fundamental ontological dimension. As McCarney argued, “questions of ontology” must be entertained as well because “no account of dialectic can be adequate without treating them.”¹²⁰

The ontological meaning of “dialectic” is conveyed, though in an abstract and obscure way, when it is presented as the grand process of change in the cosmos or the transformative power at work in the flux of things. Hegel did in fact claim that it is “in general the principle of all motion, of all life, and of all activation in the actual world.”¹²¹ However, as the principle of “all activation in the actual world,” “dialectic” does not simply denote ‘change’ *per se*, although this is certainly an essential aspect of it. On the contrary, as an onto-cosmological principle, “dialectic” is a feature of the developmental movement of “reason” which takes place ‘within’ the ‘objective world’ and the activity of thought.¹²² We can observe this, for instance, in Hegel’s *Science of Logic* where he treats “dialectic” *simultaneously* as an ontology and as a mode of thought, even within a single sentence: “we call dialectic the higher movement of reason in which...seemingly utterly separate terms pass over into each other spontaneously, through that which they are, a movement in which the presupposition sublates itself.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Ollman 2003, 12.

¹²⁰ McCarney 1987, 181. Cf. his claim that in “the usual litanies...of what is living and what is dead in Hegel, it is his ontological vision that is most readily assigned to the philosophical graveyard” (Ibid., 162).

¹²¹ Hegel 1991b, 128-129. “Everything around us can be regarded as an example of dialectic. For we know that, instead of being fixed and ultimate, everything finite is alterable and perishable, and this is nothing but the dialectic of the finite, through which the latter, being implicitly the other of itself, is driven beyond what immediately is and overturns into its opposite” (Ibid., 130).

¹²² At this point it is perhaps helpful to recall Hegel’s idea that “reason” is both ‘substance’ and ‘subject’. According to him, “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*” (Hegel 1977, 10). Cf. Whitehead’s claim that there “is Reason, asserting itself above the world, and there is Reason as one of many factors within the world” (Whitehead 1929, 10).

¹²³ Hegel 1969, 105.

The unity of the ontological and methodological dimensions of “dialectic” is conspicuously presented in Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia Logic*. In this text we read that the form of “the *logical*” has “three sides”: “*the side of abstraction or of the understanding,*” “*the dialectical or negatively rational side,*” and “*the speculative or positively rational one.*”¹²⁴ Thus the “dialectical” is necessarily present as a form of thought corresponding to the “*negatively rational*” side of the “*logical,*” hence Hegel’s claim in the *Science of Logic* that “dialectic” is “a *necessary function of reason.*”¹²⁵ The implications for methodology become clearer when we compare “dialectical” thinking to the thought of what Hegel calls the “understanding,” i.e., thought which “stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness vis-à-vis other determinacies” and “behaves toward its objects in a way that separates and abstracts them.”¹²⁶ The moment of the “understanding” is a necessary moment in the process of cognition, but to treat the finite abstractions of the “understanding” as ‘concrete’ or true in-themselves is a distortion of reality.¹²⁷ Thus the moment of the “understanding” is supplanted by the “*dialectical moment*” which “is the self-sublation of

¹²⁴ Hegel 1991b, 125.

¹²⁵ Hegel 1969, 56.

¹²⁶ Hegel 1991b, 125-26. Engels described an analogous tendency in the thinking characteristic of the natural sciences: “The analysis of Nature into its individual parts” has “left us as a legacy the habit of observing natural objects and natural processes in their isolation, detached from the whole vast interconnection of things; and therefore not in their motion, but in their repose; not as essentially changing, but as fixed constants; not in their life, but in their death” (Engels 1934, 27). Whitehead, too, emphasizes the fact that the ‘materialist’ ontology of the natural sciences results in a conception of a “lifeless” nature (Whitehead 1968, 127). Cf. the comedic novel *Tristram Shandy* (of which Marx was very fond): “There lies your mistake, my father would reply;—for, in *Foro Scientiae* there is no such thing as MURDER,—’tis only DEATH, brother” (Sterne 2009, 56). In this context it is interesting to note Hegel’s claim that an abstraction “detached from what circumscribes it”—whereby it attains “an existence of its own and a separate freedom”—is the result of “the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure ‘I’.” Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself” (Hegel 1997, 19).

¹²⁷ To do so is to commit what Whitehead termed the “Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness” (Whitehead 1925, 58).

these finite determinations on their own part, and their passing into their opposites.”¹²⁸ Put simply, this tendency of the finite to sublate itself¹²⁹ constitutes the “dialectical” nature of ‘reality’ (i.e., “the *logical*” or “reason”).¹³⁰ All finitude is ultimately a moment in an infinite process,¹³¹ famously expressed by Heraclitus’ “πάντα ῥεῖ” (“everything flows”). In this view the entire ‘cosmos’ is *alive* in the sense of being an *active process*.¹³²

The ultimate nature of the finite is thus “ideality,”¹³³ hence the importance of the “dialectical” for Hegel’s Idealism.¹³⁴ This dialectical ‘passing over’ of the finite, whereby

¹²⁸ Hegel 1991b, 128. Cf. Marx’s claim that “the laws of appropriation or of private property, laws based on the production and circulation of commodities, become changed into their direct opposite through their own internal and inexorable dialectic” (Marx 1976, 729).

¹²⁹ According to Hegel, this “is what everything finite is: its own sublation” (Hegel 1991b, 128). The finite “sublates itself by virtue of its own nature, and passes over, of itself, into its opposite” (Ibid., 129).

¹³⁰ For Hegel “all finite things...are affected with untruth; they have a concept, but their existence is not adequate to it. For this reason they must go to ground. The animal as something singular has its concept in its kind, and the kind frees itself from singularity through death” (1991b, 60). Cf. Marx: “*Death* seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the *definite* individual and to contradict their unity. But the particular individual is only a *particular species-being*, and as such mortal” (Marx 1964, 138).

¹³¹ This idea is elaborated in Hegel’s distinction between the “*spurious or negative* infinite” and “true Infinity.” The “spurious” infinite “is nothing but the negation of the finite” whereby “the finite arises again in the same way, so that it is no more sublated than not,” i.e., when something “becomes an other, but the other is itself a something, so it likewise becomes and other, and so on *ad infinitum*” (Hegel 1991b, 149). We have “*genuine Infinity*” when what something “passes into is entirely the same as what passes into it—neither having any further determination than this identical one of being an *other*—in its passing into another, [that] something only comes together *with itself*”—i.e., when something is related “to itself in the passing and in the other” (Ibid., 151). This is also known as “the negation of the negation,” i.e., when “the Infinite is affirmative, and it is only the finite which is sublated” (Ibid., 152). Hegel regarded the “genuine Infinite” as “the basic concept of philosophy” (Ibid.). The context within which Marx applied this concept of the “negation of the negation” in *Capital* requires the ontology elaborated here.

¹³² “How true,” wrote Thomas Carlyle, “that there is nothing dead in this Universe; that what we call dead is only changed, its forces working in inverse order! ‘The leaf that lies rotting in moist winds,’ says one, ‘has still force; else how could it rot?’... The thing that lies isolated inactive thou shalt nowhere discover.... [Indeed], what is this Infinite of Things itself, which men name Universe, but an action, a sum-total of Actions and Activities? The living ready-made sum-total of these three,—which Calculation cannot add, cannot bring on its tablets; yet the sum, we say, is written visible: All that has been done, All that is doing, All that will be done! Understand it well, the Thing thou beholdest, that Thing is an Action, the product and expression of exerted Force: the All of Things is an infinite conjugation of the verb To do. Shoreless Fountain-Ocean of Force, of power to do; wherein Force rolls and circles, billowing, many-streamed, harmonious.... From beyond the Star-galaxies, from before the Beginning of Days, it billows and rolls,—round thee, nay thyself art of it, in this point of Space where thou now standest, in this moment which thy clock measures” (Carlyle 2002, 331-2).

¹³³ The “truth of the finite is...its *ideality*” (Hegel 1991b, 152).

¹³⁴ Ibid., 153. “This ideality of the finite is the most important proposition of philosophy, and for that reason every genuine philosophy is *Idealism*. Everything depends on not mistaking for the Infinite that which is at once reduced

finitude sublates itself, is the power of *negativity*, i.e., the ontological antithesis of “finite” or “one-sided” determinations. The internal relation of antitheses makes them each a moment in the process of their self-sublation.¹³⁵ For example, the categories of “Being” and “Nonbeing” are negatively related to each other. The existence of one implies the existence of the other, and they cannot exist without each other. Grasped at the level of their negative unity, they pass infinitely over into each other. Their unity is unfathomable for the abstractive intellect that Hegel called “understanding.” With “speculative” thought their “*positive*” unity—their *sublation*—is known as “Becoming.”

‘Dialectical negativity’ is a key component of the philosophy of ‘internal relations’ (also known as ‘Process Philosophy’). This mode of thought understands determinate ‘things’ as *relations* (or, to put it another way, as *activities*). Ollman explains that “the philosophy of internal relations” treats “the relations in which anything stands as essential parts of what it is, so that a significant change in any of these relations registers as a qualitative change in the system of which it is part”; thus “relations rather than things” are “the fundamental building blocks of reality.”¹³⁶ Relations are internal to each “thing”¹³⁷ and determine the *movement* of identity.¹³⁸

in its determination to what is particular and finite” (Ibid.). In his lectures on the history of philosophy Hegel maintained that, in a word, “Idealism” means that the finite must be sublated.

¹³⁵ Cf. Marx’s claim that “What constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category” (Marx 1976, 168).

¹³⁶ Ollman 2003, 5. Anne F. Pomeroy writes that “a philosophy of internal relations is one in which there is a real transmission of historical data and a constitution of each ‘entity’ by its particular relational incorporation of that data, yielding process...as the organic movement of inheritance and the productive relationality to, of, and by that inheritance. It is thus that any part examined can be analyzed at the multiple levels of its constitutive relations” (Anne 2004, 25).

¹³⁷ Ollman calls this “ontological relations” (Ollman 2003, 25).

¹³⁸ With an ontology of internal relations, reality is conceived as a totality and as *process*. As Allen Wood claimed, in Marx’s eyes the world “is a system of organically interconnected processes” (Wood 2004, 208). Thus it is only an *abstract* rendering of the life-world that gives us the picture of stable ‘things’ with an apparent self-sustaining identity. Cf. Whitehead’s claim that “There is a conventional view of experience, never admitted when explicitly challenged, but persistently lurking in the tacit presuppositions. This view conceives conscious experience as a clear-cut knowledge of clear-cut items with clear-cut connections with each other. This is the conception of a trim, tidy, finite experience uniformly illuminated. No notion could be further from the truth. In the first place the

As an ontological principle, ‘dialectical negativity’ is present throughout Marx’s writings. For instance, he presented the wage-labour/capital relation as an “*internal* relation” and “*contradiction*,” and hence as “a dynamic relationship driving towards resolution.”¹³⁹

Marx’s claims regarding the existence of the “dialectic of negativity” in the production process of capitalism indicates that his idea of a “dialectical” inquiry into the “real movement” of capitalist society is premised on the idea of “dialectic” as a “higher movement of reason.” For example, in *The Holy Family* he wrote that the

“question is not of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *considers* as its aim. The question is *what the proletariat is*, and what, consequent on that *being*, it will be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocable and obviously demonstrated in its own life situation.”¹⁴⁰

It is a question of “*what the proletariat is*” because—to use Hegel’s phrase—“*what is* is reason.” The “higher movement of reason” is also invoked in Marx’s assertion that the “proletariat” is “the *negative* side of the contradiction” between itself and “its opposite, the condition for its existence, what makes it the proletariat, i.e., private property.”¹⁴¹ According to him, “private property...drives itself in its economic movement towards its own dissolution...only inasmuch as it produces the proletariat *as* proletariat, that misery conscious of its spiritual and physical misery...and therefore self-abolishing.”¹⁴²

equating of experience with clarity of knowledge is against evidence. In our own lives, and at any one moment, there is a focus of attention, a few items in clarity of awareness, but interconnected vaguely and yet insistently with other items in dim apprehension, and this dimness shading off imperceptibly into undiscriminated feeling” (Whitehead 1929, 78).

¹³⁹ Marx 1964, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Marx and Engels 1956, 53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 52.

4. Phenomenology and the “Higher Dialectic of the Concept”

The phenomenological character of Marx’s thought also owes much to Hegel’s influence and we are able to derive substantial insights into it through an examination of Hegel’s writings. In the process we shall see that Marx’s so-called ‘inversion’ of Hegel’s method is not what it appears, and that their methods are, in fact, essentially similar. Hegel defined phenomenology as the “Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance.”¹⁴³ This phenomenological “dialectic” of “appearance” and “essence” is evoked, for instance, by Hegel’s claim that “nature is *rational within itself*” and that “it is this *actual* reason present within it which knowledge must investigate and grasp conceptually—not the shapes and contingencies which are visible on the surface, but nature’s eternal harmony, conceived, however, as the law and essence *immanent* within it.”¹⁴⁴ According to Marx, “all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence.”¹⁴⁵ There are various other passages in Marx’s writings which demonstrate this phenomenological approach to the critique of political economy.¹⁴⁶ For instance, he thought that “Surplus-value and the rate of surplus-value” are “the invisible essence to be investigated, whereas the rate of profit and hence the form of surplus-value as profit are visible surface phenomena.”¹⁴⁷ This phenomenological orientation is also evident in his

¹⁴³ Hegel 1977, 493.

¹⁴⁴ Hegel 1991, 12. “For what matters,” Hegel wrote, “is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present” (Ibid, 20). Cf. Aristotle’s claim regarding “scientific knowledge”: “We all suppose that what we know is not even capable of being otherwise; of things capable of being otherwise we do not know, when they have passed outside our observation, whether they exist or not. Therefore the object of scientific knowledge is of necessity. Therefore it is eternal; for things that are of necessity in the unqualified sense are all eternal; and things that are eternal are ungenerated and imperishable” (Aristotle 1998, 140).

¹⁴⁵ Marx 1981, 956.

¹⁴⁶ In a discussion about the phenomenological “dialectic of appearance” in Marx’s work, Enzo Paci claimed that the “reader of *Capital* who follows the dynamics of the analysis cannot fail to be struck by the continuous metamorphosis of appearance and reality” (Paci 1972, 423).

¹⁴⁷ Marx 1981, 134.

treatment of “estranged” consciousness and in the course of his elaboration he evokes the ontological concepts of internal relations and dialectical negativity as well. He claimed that in an “estranged form of appearance” the “inner connections” of phenomena “remain hidden,”¹⁴⁸ and that we see this, for example, with Lassalle’s conception of wages. In his view Lassalle “followed the bourgeois economists in mistaking the appearance of the matter for its essence,” whereas Marx’s “scientific insight” in this instance was “that wages are not what they *appear* to be, namely the value or price of labour, but only a disguised form of the *value or price of labour power*.”¹⁴⁹

There are numerous instances in Hegel’s writings in which he makes the phenomenological distinction between “that which is only *appearance*, transient and insignificant” from “that which truly and in itself merits the name of *actuality*.”¹⁵⁰ “Actual knowledge,” he claimed, “insofar as it does not remain outside the object but in fact occupies itself with it, must be immanent to the object, the proper movement of its nature, only expressed in the form of thought and taken up into consciousness.”¹⁵¹ This “dialectical” relationship of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 956. He also mentioned this in a letter to Engels where he claimed that the “vulgar economist’s *way of looking at things* arises, namely, because it is only the immediate phenomenal *form* of these relations that is reflected in their brains and not their *inner connection*. Incidentally, if the latter were the case what need would there be of *science*?” (Marx 1975, 179).

¹⁴⁹ Marx 2010c, 352. It thus “became clear that the wage labourer is only allowed to work for his own livelihood, i.e., *to live*, if he works a certain amount of time without pay for the capitalist”; that “the whole capitalist system of production turns on the prolongation of this free labour”; and that “the system of wage labour is consequently a system of slavery” (Ibid.). Engels claimed that “socialism became a science” with the “discoveries” of “the materialist conception of history and the revelation of the secret of capitalist production by means of surplus value” (Engels 1934, 33).

¹⁵⁰ 1991b, 29. Cf. his discussion about “the conscious insight into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge” in the *Phenomenology* (Hegel 1977, 50).

¹⁵¹ Hegel 2007b, 43.

subject and object¹⁵² inherent in the process of cognition is present throughout Hegel's work¹⁵³ and coupled with it is an idea of consciousness which is also present in Marx's writings.

According to Hegel, "consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself.... Since both are *for* the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison."¹⁵⁴ A significant implication that arises from this is expressed in Hegel's claim that "in the alteration" of our "knowledge, the object itself alters for [us] too, for the knowledge that was present was essentially a knowledge of the object."¹⁵⁵ This can be elaborated in conjunction with the idea of "intentionality." Franz Brentano described "intentionality" as "the fact that something is an object for the mentally active subject, and, as such, is present in some manner in his consciousness, whether it is merely thought of or also desired, shunned, etc."¹⁵⁶ Marx's writings indicate the existence of an incipient idea of "intentionality" in his thought. He claimed, for instance, that "my object can only" exist "for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity; because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far

¹⁵² Hegel thought that subjectivity and objectivity are "thoroughly dialectical" and that it is "absurd" to consider them "as a fixed and abstract antithesis" (Hegel 1991b, 273).

¹⁵³ He claimed that "the task of science, and more precisely of philosophy, is nothing but the overcoming of this antithesis [between subjectivity and objectivity] through thinking. In cognition, what has to be done is all a matter of stripping away the alien character of the objective world that confronts us" (Hegel 1991b, 273).

¹⁵⁴ (Hegel 1997, 54). McCarney argued that "Hegel insists" that consciousness "is always consciousness of something" (McCarney 1987, 165).

¹⁵⁵ In other words, "as the knowledge changes, so too does the object, for it essentially belonged to this knowledge" (Hegel 1977, 54). He referred to this "dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object" as "precisely what is called experience" (Ibid., 55).

¹⁵⁶ Brentano 2015, 189. It can be described further as "reference to a content, direction toward an object...or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object [intentionally] within itself" (Ibid., 92).

as *my* sense goes.”¹⁵⁷ This aspect of Marx’s thought also bears the influence of Aristotle¹⁵⁸ whose *On The Soul*¹⁵⁹ contains an nascent theory of “intentionality.”¹⁶⁰

In Brentano’s wake, Edmund Husserl reinvigorated the idea of “intentional experiences.”¹⁶¹ The phenomenological character of Marx’s method is congruent with Husserl’s treatment of phenomenology as a science grounding experience in “the world as the universal horizon, common to all men, of actually existing things.”¹⁶² Consider, for instance, the way in which Marx makes the commodity into a phenomenon at the outset of *Capital*. He claims that it “appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing,” but that “analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”¹⁶³ This moment in the process of Marx’s method parallels Husserl’s “phenomenological reflection,” which he also called “epoché.” In short, this denotes the act of placing in question all “hitherto existing convictions” and forbidding “in advance any judgemental use of them.”¹⁶⁴ According to

¹⁵⁷ Marx 1964, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “the perceptive being is, in potency, such as the perceived thing already is in full activity.... So it is acted upon when it is not like the perceived thing, but when it is the state that results from being acted upon, it has become likened to it, and is such as that is” (Aristotle 2004, 99).

¹⁵⁹ Marx was closely familiar with this text and even translated it into German.

¹⁶⁰ Aristotle claimed: “If thinking works the same way perceiving does, it would either be some way of being acted upon by the intelligible thing, or something else of that sort. Therefore it must be without attributes but receptive of the form and in potency not to be the form but to be such as it is” (Ibid., 138-9); “the intellect, in its being-[at]-work, is the things it thinks” (Ibid., 148). Put another way: “what thinks and what is thought are the same thing, for contemplative knowing and what is known in that way are the same thing” (Ibid., 142); “Knowledge, in its being-at-work, is the same as the thing it knows” (Ibid., 145).

¹⁶¹ Husserl 1999, 323-324. He described this as the “being directed” to objects which is “an immanent essential feature of the respective experiences involved” and maintained that “in the experiences of consciousness themselves, that of which we are conscious is included *as such*” (Husserl 1970, 85). Cf. Whitehead’s claim that “thought is a factor in the fact of experience,” and thus “the immediate fact is what it is, partly by reason of the thought involved in it. The quality of an act of experience is largely determined by the factor of the thinking which it contains” (Whitehead 1929, 80).

¹⁶² Husserl 1970, 164.

¹⁶³ Marx 1976, 163. Cf. Paci’s claim that “Marx has brought to light what political economy as a science has hidden. He began from the ‘data’ and discovered what the data were hiding. His analysis is phenomenological, since it has transformed the data into *phenomena*. The same thing happens when an ideology is examined: the reality hidden beyond the ideological construction is eventually discovered” (Paci 1972, 391). The “trinity formula” is an example of “a mystery that Marx wants to bring to light and phenomenologically transform into a *phenomenon*” (Ibid., 428).

¹⁶⁴ Husserl 1970, 76.

Husserl “phenomenological reflection leads to a multiple and yet synthetically unified intentionality. There are continually varying differences in the modes of appearing of objects, which are caused by the changing of our ‘orientation’...with the consequent differences in perspective involved.”¹⁶⁵ He claimed further that

“If one attends to the distinction between things as ‘originally one’s own’ and as ‘empathized’ from others, in respect to the *how* of the manners of appearance, and if one attends to the possibility of discrepancies between one’s own and empathized views, then what one actually experiences *originaliter* as a perceptual thing is transformed, for each of us, into a mere ‘representation of’, ‘appearance of’, the one objectively existing thing..... ‘The’ thing itself is actually that which no one experiences as really seen, since it is always in motion, always, and for everyone, a unity for consciousness of the openly endless multiplicity of changing experiences and experienced things, one’s own and those of others.”¹⁶⁶

Husserl’s meaning here is not that “things” cannot be truly known or universally experienced as actually existing and it would be a mistake to think that his phenomenological “epoché” results in a radical skepticism. The same principle stands for the philosophy underlying Marx’s motto, as recorded in a “Confessions” questionnaire in 1865: “*De omnibus dubitandum.*” Hegel’s writing is useful for articulating this aspect of Marx’s philosophy as well.

Hegel claimed that “everything must be doubted, all presuppositions given up, to reach the truth as created through the [Concept].”¹⁶⁷ He famously articulated the realisation of actual

¹⁶⁵ Husserl 1999, 324.

¹⁶⁶ Husserl 1970, 164.

¹⁶⁷ Hegel 1968, 406.

knowledge as the union of the “Concept”—which for him is *subjective*—and objectivity, and he called this unity the “Idea”:¹⁶⁸

“For since the rational, which is synonymous with the Idea, becomes actual by entering into external existence, it emerges in an infinite wealth of forms, appearances, and shapes and surrounds its core with a brightly coloured covering in which consciousness at first resides, but which only the concept can penetrate in order to find the inner pulse,¹⁶⁹ and detect its continued beat even within the external shapes.”¹⁷⁰

It is generally agreed among scholars of Marx’s work that he diverges from Hegel at this point. Upon further examination, however, it becomes evident that Marx remained a lot closer to Hegel’s Idealism than is commonly believed. For instance, in his analysis of a form of thought in which “*everything appears upside down*,” Marx used a manner of expression that parallels Hegel’s phenomenological description of the “external existence” of “the rational”:

“The finished configuration of economic relations, as these are visible on the surface, in their actual existence, and therefore also in the notions with which the bearers and agents of these relations seek to gain an understanding of them, is very different from the configuration of their inner core, which is essential but concealed, and the concept corresponding to it. It is in fact the very reverse and antithesis of this.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Hegel 1991b, 214. Cf. Ian Fraser’s claim that “When the objective reality...corresponds with the universal concept...then the Idea...is realised as reason and truth. When they are not in correspondence then the result is untruth or ‘mere *Appearance*’” (Fraser 1997, 87).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Heraclitus: “One thunderbolt strikes root through everything” (Heraclitus 2001, 19).

¹⁷⁰ Hegel 1991, 20-1. According to Hegel, this “development of the Idea as the activity of its own rationality is something which thought, since it is subjective, merely observes, without for its part adding anything extra to it” (Hegel 1991, 60).

¹⁷¹ Marx 1981, 311.

In Hegelian terms, comprehending what Marx described as “the concept corresponding to” the object of thought is achieved via the “higher dialectic of the concept” (the concept’s “moving principle”):

“The higher dialectic of the concept consists not merely in producing and apprehending the determination as an opposite and limiting factor, but in producing and apprehending the *positive* content and result which it contains; and it is this alone which makes it a *development* and immanent progression. This dialectic, then, is not an *external* activity of subjective thought, but the *very soul* of the content¹⁷² which puts forth its branches and fruit organically.”¹⁷³

Sayers claimed that Marx “essentially agrees with Hegel’s view” in this passage and Ian Fraser claimed that, in general, “Marx is talking about the concept and its actualization just as Hegel is despite Marx’s attempt to confine Hegel’s dialectic to the realm of thought.”¹⁷⁴ After all, Marx identified “the nature of capital” with “the essential character of its very concept.”¹⁷⁵

5. Marx’s “Speculative” Thought and Undue Criticism of Hegel

Marx’s critical comments about Hegel’s “dialectical method” complicates the interpretation of his own. It is well known that Marx took issue with the way in which Hegel attributed a kind of mystical agency to the “Idea,” treating it as a form of alienation whereby rational thought is attributed to the “Concept” existing independently from the minds of human

¹⁷² Engels described this as “the Hegelian ‘inner purpose’—i.e., a purpose which is not imported into Nature by some third party acting purposively, such as the wisdom of providence, but lies in the necessity of the thing itself” (Engels 1934, 78).

¹⁷³ Hegel 1991, 60.

¹⁷⁴ Sayers 1978, 158; Fraser 1997, 99.

¹⁷⁵ Marx 1973, 415. Cf. his claim in the third volume of *Capital* that in “a general analysis of the present kind, it is assumed throughout that actual conditions correspond to their concept, or, and this amounts to the same thing, actual conditions are depicted only in so far as they express their own general type” (Marx 1981, 242).

individuals. Commentators on Marx's work generally agree that it was this move, according to Marx, which resulted in the mystification of the "dialectical method." For example, Hegel claimed that the

"Concept, which is initially only subjective proceeds to objectify itself by virtue of its own activity and without the help of an external material or stuff. And likewise the object is not rigid and without process; instead, its process consists in its proving itself to be that which is at the same time subjective, and this forms the advance to the *Idea*."¹⁷⁶

This is indeed a key issue that prompted Marx's divergence from Hegel's Idealism.¹⁷⁷ In 1873 Marx articulated his criticism as follows:

"My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Hegel 1991b, 273.

¹⁷⁷ Engels claimed that "in its Hegelian form," the "dialectical method" was "unusable" because for Hegel "dialectics is the self-development of the concept," whereby "the dialectical development apparent in nature and history...is only a copy of the self-movement of the concept going on from eternity, no one knows where, but at all events independently of any thinking human brain. This ideological perversion had to be done away with" (Engels 1958, 43-44).

¹⁷⁸ Marx 1976, 102.

Hegel did in fact write that the “developed, authentic actuality” of the Idea “is to be as *subject* and so as spirit.”¹⁷⁹ However, insofar as it is “subject” as “spirit,” it is arguable that humanity is the “subject” within which Hegel’s “Idea” is realized. According to Hegel, the “Idea” is the unity of the “Concept” and objectivity¹⁸⁰—hence his assertion that we must “base science...on the development of thought and the concept”—but from the perspective of his philosophy this unity is only achieved in the thinking mind, the “Spirit,” of humanity.¹⁸¹ Hegel’s identification of the human being with “Reason” means that we are a real subject to the extent that “self-conscious Reason” has developed. After all, he wrote that overcoming the “alien character of the objective world that confronts us” requires “tracing...what is objective back to the Concept, *which is our innermost self*” (my emphasis).¹⁸² The point at which mysticism appears to arise most strongly, however, is with the *Absolute Idea*: “the Idea that thinks itself” and “is [present] *as thinking*”—the “Idea” which, according to Engels, “is only absolute insofar as [Hegel] has absolutely nothing to say about it.”¹⁸³

At the end of his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel wrote that “Up to this point the Idea in its development through its various stages has been *our* ob-ject; but from now on, the Idea is its own ob-ject.”¹⁸⁴ He associated the “Absolute Idea” with the “νοήσεως νόησις” of Aristotle, i.e., ‘the thought of thought’ (“God”¹⁸⁵ conceived as pure contemplative activity), and yet for Hegel this could also be a comment on the ‘divine’ nature of rational thought itself—and of humanity as the

¹⁷⁹ Hegel 1991b, 287.

¹⁸⁰ “The Idea is what is true *in and for itself*, the *absolute unity of Concept and Objectivity*.... The Idea is the *Truth*; for this means that objectivity corresponds with the Concept” (Hegel 1991b, 286).

¹⁸¹ Hegel 1991, 15; Hegel 1991b, 286.

¹⁸² Hegel 1991b, 273.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 303; Engels 1958, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Hegel 1991b, 303.

¹⁸⁵ According to Hegel “God alone is the genuine agreement between Concept and reality” (Hegel 1991b, 60).

self-consciously rational being—rather than the “Absolute Idea” *per se*.¹⁸⁶ In fact, Hegel’s definition of “God” as “Unity of the Universal and Individual” is consistent with the way he describes fully developed humanity, i.e., self-consciously rational individuals.¹⁸⁷

Even though Marx was adamant that his “dialectical method” was the “direct opposite” of Hegel’s, textual evidence indicates that Marx’s “method” was essentially Hegelian insofar as he sublated the ontological idea that “Reason directs the world,” adopted a phenomenological orientation, and conveyed the activity of “speculative” thought in his writing. Marx’s disparaging remarks about Hegel’s “speculative” philosophy¹⁸⁸ are misleading for interpreters of his self-proclaimed ‘materialist’ inversion of Hegel’s method.¹⁸⁹ Abundant textual evidence indicates that Marx thought “speculatively.” In the manuscript that became the third volume of *Capital*, he wrote that uncovering “the real, inner connections of the capitalist production process is a very intricate thing and a work of great detail; it is one of the tasks of science to reduce the visible and merely apparent movement to the actual inner movement.”¹⁹⁰ Marx’s recognition of the “inner connections” of the capitalist mode of production is “dialectical” (“negatively rational”) in

¹⁸⁶ As Geraets et al. claim, “Hegel...is clearly claiming that *our* thinking has at this stage become ‘divine’” (Ibid., 335).

¹⁸⁷ Hegel 1956, 50. Cf. Husserl’s claim that “Along with [our] growing, more and more perfect cognitive power over the universe, [we] also [gain] an ever more perfect mastery over [our] practical surrounding world, one which expands in an unending progression. This also involves a mastery over humankind as belonging to the real surrounding world, i.e., mastery over [ourselves] and [each other], an ever greater power over [our] fate, and thus an ever fuller ‘happiness’—‘happiness’ as rationally conceivable for [us]. For [we] can also know what is true in itself about values and goods. All this lies within the horizon of this rationalism as its obvious consequence for humanity. Humanity is thus truly an image of God. In a sense analogous to that in which mathematics speaks of infinitely distant points, straight lines, etc., one can say metaphorically that God is the ‘infinitely distant human’” (Husserl 1970, 66).

¹⁸⁸ E.g., Marx 1964, 170-193; Marx 1973, 102.

¹⁸⁹ The fact that Marx charged Hegel with mysticism has encouraged readers who are sympathetic to his thought to write off Hegel as an Idealist whose “speculative” philosophy was of no importance for Marx’s method because it is dissociated from consideration of the ‘material’ world. Norman Levine, for instance, claims that “Marx retained many forms of the Hegelian Method after they were shed of their Speculative content” and that he “confined the Hegelian System within the Speculative, which he rejected” (Levine 2012, 12, 72).

¹⁹⁰ Marx 1981, 428.

Hegel's sense of the "dialectic" as "the *immanent* transcending" which overcomes the "one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding."¹⁹¹ However, the manner in which Marx comprehended what he believed to be the "actual" movement of the social life-process of capitalism in *Capital* also involved "speculative" thought because in that text he "apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition."¹⁹² It is more accurate to describe Marx's method as "speculative" because the "dialectical" moment is sublated within the "positive" moment. If Marx's cognition had stopped at the "negatively rational" moment he would be stuck positing the mere transience of capitalism.

The significance of "speculative" thought for Marx's revolutionary social theory is evident, for example, in his recognition of the "inner connection" between economic conditions of "rent (landed property), *profit* (capital) and wages (wage labour)," which he thought are "conditions of struggle and antagonism" that contain the potential for revolutionary social transformation.¹⁹³ The activity of the "critic" that he described in his letter to Ruge, presented in *Capital* and elsewhere, displays the birth process of "communist society" as "the true reality."¹⁹⁴ Thus while his analysis of the capitalist mode of production and criticism of the way it appears to classical and "vulgar" political economists operates in accordance with the principle of "dialectical"

¹⁹¹ Hegel 1991b, 128. This is why "the dialectical," according to Hegel, "constitutes the moving soul of scientific progression" and "is the principle through which alone *immanent coherence and necessity* enter into the content of science" (Hegel 1991b, 128).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 131. Cf. Hegel's claim that "the essential character of the rational" is "just to bring together what is separated" (Hegel 1971, 49).

¹⁹³ 1975c, 64. Cf. Marx's critical remark about 'utopian socialists' in *The Poverty of Philosophy* who "see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society" (Marx and Engels 1976, 177).

¹⁹⁴ Hence Engels claim that the "task of economic science" is to indicate the "imminent dissolution" of the capitalist system "and to reveal, within the already dissolving economic development, the elements of the future new organisation of production and exchange" (Engels 1934, 168).

negativity, his thought is “speculative” nonetheless. We see this, for instance, in a letter to Engels:

“At last we have arrived at the *forms of manifestation* which serve as the starting point in the vulgar conception: rent...; profit...from capital; wages, from labour. But from our standpoint things now look different. The apparent movement is explained. Furthermore, A. Smith’s nonsense, which has become the *main pillar* of all political economy hitherto...is overthrown. The entire movement in this apparent form. Finally, since those 3 items (wages, rent, profit (interest)) constitute the sources of income of the 3 classes of landowners, capitalists and wage labourers, we have the *class struggle*, as the conclusion in which the movement and disintegration of the whole shit resolves itself.”¹⁹⁵

This kind of “speculative” thinking is present in the infamous passage on the “negation of the negation” in chapter thirty-two of the first volume of *Capital*.¹⁹⁶

6. The “Concrete” Nature of “Speculative” Thought and Clarification of Marx’s ‘Empiricism’

Rather than providing clarity on the matter, it appears that Marx’s excessively strong distinction between Hegel’s method and his own has for the most part encouraged a range of misinterpretations.¹⁹⁷ A common misinterpretation is the tendency to think that Marx was a kind

¹⁹⁵ Marx and Engels 1988, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Marx 1976, 929. Marx claimed that “capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself” (Ibid.).

¹⁹⁷ Theorists whose work contributes to the ‘New Dialectic’ school, for instance, interpret Marx’s “dialectical method” in an excessively formal and schematic way. In this tradition, Marx’s so-called “systematic dialectic” is understood as “a method of exhibiting the inner articulation of a given whole” (Arthur 2014,

of ‘materialist’-Empiricist that diverges fundamentally from Hegel’s method.¹⁹⁸ Marx claimed that “Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself...whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.”¹⁹⁹ And yet what Marx described as “concrete” implies the activity of “speculative” *thought* and not simply the ‘material world’ that we perceive sensuously.²⁰⁰

Hegel maintained that “the speculative...expressly contains the very [abstract] antitheses at which the understanding stops short...sublated within itself; and precisely for this reason it proves to be concrete and a totality.”²⁰¹ This is because the speculatively “rational,” “positive result” of “dialectic,” “although it is something-thought and something-abstract, is at the same time...a *unity of distinct determinations*.”²⁰² Marx made an essentially similar claim in the *Grundrisse*:

“The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse.”²⁰³ It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the

269). Caligaris and Starosta explain that “most contributors [to the ‘New Dialectic’ school] agree that the structure of the argument in *Capital* is organised in a dialectical form which, at the very least, can be said to draw formal inspiration from the general form of movement of categories that Hegel deploys in his *Logic*” (Caligaris and Starosta 2014, 89).

¹⁹⁸ H.T. Wilson, for example, claimed that “Marx endorsed an empirical method in explicit opposition to the speculative method of Hegel” (Wilson 1991, 61).

¹⁹⁹ Marx 1973, 101.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Hegel 1991b, 78-9.

²⁰¹ Hegel 1991b, 132. In fact, according to Hegel, speculative “philosophy does not deal with mere abstractions or formal thoughts at all, but only with concrete thoughts” (Ibid., 131). He states further that “Philosophy does not waste time with...empty and otherworldly stuff. What philosophy has to do with is always something concrete and strictly present” (Ibid., 150).

²⁰² Ibid., 131.

²⁰³ Cf. Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia Logic*: “As for...concreteness of content, it simply means that the objects of consciousness are known as inwardly determined, and as a unity of distinct determinations” (Ibid., 76).

point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception.”²⁰⁴

It would thus be a mistake to interpret Marx’s ‘materialism’ as another form of Empiricism which alleges that the “concrete” is simply the ‘material world’ that we perceive sensuously. Hegel claimed that the issue with *this* kind of “Materialism,” i.e., “the view in which matter as such counts as what is genuinely objective,” is that it overlooks the fact that “matter is itself already something abstract, something which cannot be perceived as such. We can therefore say that there is no ‘matter’; for whenever it exists it is always something determinate and concrete. Yet this abstract ‘matter’ is supposed to be the foundation of everything sensible.”²⁰⁵ Marx’s ‘materialist’ epistemology is not consistent with *this* kind of ‘materialist’ Empiricism; on the contrary, his description of what counts as “concrete” is the “result” of “thinking” and it is consistent with Hegel’s “speculative” claim that “‘Matter’ is an abstraction precisely because form is present in it, to be sure, but only as an indifferent and external determination.”²⁰⁶

Ultimately, Marx’s claim that the “premises”²⁰⁷ he starts out with are “real premises” that can “be verified in a purely empirical way” must be interpreted in accordance with the ontological and phenomenological nature of his method.²⁰⁸ His idea that “*Sense-perception...must be the basis of all science*” presupposes that our senses have “become *human*,” and “*senses capable of human gratification*”—“the human nature of the senses”—have a

²⁰⁴ Marx 1973, 101.

²⁰⁵ Hegel 1991b, 79.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 159.

²⁰⁷ These premises are “the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity” (Marx and Engels 1998, 36-7).

²⁰⁸ Ibid. Cf. Husserl’s claim that “*Empiricism* can only be overcome by the most universal and consistent empiricism, which puts in place of the restricted [term] ‘experience’ of the empiricists the necessarily broadened concept of experience [inclusive] of intuition which offers original data, an intuition which in all its forms...shows the manner and form of its legitimation through phenomenological clarification” (Husserl 1990, 335).

“rational” character which entails the “intentionality” of a ‘self-consciously rational’ subject.²⁰⁹

Marx claimed that

“If [humanity] draws all [its] knowledge, sensation, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, then what has to be done is to arrange the empirical world in such a way that [humanity] experiences and becomes accustomed to what is truly human in it and that [we become] aware of [ourselves] as [human beings].”²¹⁰

Thus his claim that the “question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory” but “a *practical* question” is not a sufficient basis for identifying him as a conventional Empiricist.²¹¹ Marx associates sense experience with the moment of *appearance* in the process of cognition involved in a “scientific analysis.”²¹² He claimed, for instance, that the

“general and necessary tendencies of capital must be distinguished from their forms of appearance.

While it is not our intention here to consider the way in which the immanent laws of capitalist production manifest themselves in the external movement of the individual

²⁰⁹ Marx 1964, 143; 134; 141. Cf. McCarney’s claim that “Marx’s dialectic presupposes from the start a subject meeting minimal conditions of rationality and capable of developing through the dialectical process so as to meet more exacting ones,” and thus “the possibility arises that a vindication of dialectics may have at its core not an empirical regularity but a movement of reason” (McCarney 1990, 118; 14).

²¹⁰ Marx 1975b, 130.

²¹¹ Marx and Engels 1998, 569. Cf. Whitehead’s idea that “there is progress from thought to practice, and regress from practice to the same thought. This interplay of thought and practice is the supreme authority” (Whitehead 1929, 81).

²¹² Cf. Whitehead’s claim that “sense perception for all its practical importance is very superficial in its disclosure of the nature of things. This conclusion is supported by the character of delusiveness—that is, of illusion—which persistently clings to sense perception. For example, our perception of stars which years ago may have vanished.... My quarrel with modern epistemology concerns its exclusive stress upon sense perception for the provision of data respecting nature. Sense perception does not provide the data in terms of which we interpret it” (Whitehead 1968, 133).

capitals, assert themselves as the coercive laws of competition, and therefore enter into the consciousness of the individual capitalist as the motives which drive him forward, this much is clear: a scientific analysis of competition is possible only if we grasp the inner nature of capital, just as the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are intelligible only to someone who is acquainted with their real motions, which are not perceptible to the senses.”²¹³

7. A Note on the Relationship between Hegel’s Philosophy and Marx’s Thought, and its Significance for ‘Marxism’

There are indeed substantial grounds for Fraser’s claim that “Hegel’s and Marx’s dialectic are not opposites” but “are instead intrinsically similar.”²¹⁴ The similarity suggests that the “essential task” of a ‘Marxist’ social theory is, as McCarney claimed, “to discover and express the rational potentiality” within the capitalist order which “accords with the midwife role of theory in dialectical tradition.”²¹⁵ “What is required to make such a role viable,” he continued, “is the assumption that the present really is pregnant with a more rational future, that, in Hegelian terminology, the rational is the actual”—an “assumption” in “pressing need of justification.”²¹⁶ Regardless of whether this can be justified or not—and whether or not we agree with Hegel that it “has been proved in Philosophy”—it is not possible to critically appropriate *Marx’s* “dialectical method” without the sublation of the ontological idea that “Reason directs the world.” This ontological principle is ultimately indispensable for his interest in the “dialectical immanent nature” (to use Hegel’s phrase) of capitalism while he sought to

²¹³ Marx 1976, 433.

²¹⁴ Fraser 1997, 82.

²¹⁵ McCarney 1990, 129.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

‘scientifically’ comprehend the “real movement” of its genesis, life, and death as it engenders the possibility of a “free” mode of social life.²¹⁷

To treat “reason” as the substance of ‘everything’ is to go against the ‘materialism’ that many ‘Marxists’ define themselves by. As McCarney claimed, the “real problem is whether one needs the assumption that reason is the substance not just of ‘spiritual’ but also of ‘external’ things.”²¹⁸ However, the analysis of Marx’s writings in this chapter indicates that this “problem” is not an issue for the view he expressed in them. Ultimately, Hegel’s claim that “the supreme and ultimate purpose of science” is “to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that *is*, or actuality, through cognition of” its “accord with actuality and experience” is consistent with Marx’s revolutionary orientation.²¹⁹ This general principle manifests in his writings as part of the philosophical basis for revolutionary *discord*. After all, Marx did not interpret Hegel’s infamous claim that “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational” as a conservative statement or some kind of philosophical vindication of the existing order.²²⁰ It was instead a vital source of philosophical inspiration for Marx’s attempt at a “*relentless criticism of all existing conditions*.”²²¹

²¹⁷ Hegel 1969, 105; Marx and Engels 1998, 57.

²¹⁸ McCarney 2000, 74.

²¹⁹ Hegel 1991b, 29. According to Hegel, philosophy’s “accord with actuality and experience” is “an outward touchstone” for “the truth of philosophy” (Ibid.).

²²⁰ Hegel 1991, 20. Mészáros claimed that the “function” of philosophy in the Hegelian sense is “reconciliatory resignation” to “the false positivity of the established world” which “could only result in an essentially pessimistic worldview of unavoidable reconciliation and inward-oriented resignation” (Mészáros 2011, 38). Cf. Fraser’s claim that this statement “does not mean that what currently exists is rational in its observable form and that Hegel is therefore justifying existing institutions and conditions. It is rather that the rational is present even within an imperfect world and the Speculative philosopher’s task is to comprehend this rationality” (Fraser 1997, 90). Engels thought that Hegel’s statement is revolutionary because it carries the meaning that “All that exists deserves to perish” (Engels 1958, 11).

²²¹ Marx 1967, 212.

Chapter Two - Philosophical Anthropology

*“By the sea, by the desolate nocturnal sea,
 Stands a youthful man,
 His breast full of sadness, his head full of doubt.
 And with bitter lips he questions the waves:

 ‘Oh, solve me the riddle of life!
 The cruel, world-old riddle,
 Concerning which already many a head hath been racked.
 Heads in hieroglyphic hats,
 Heads in turbans and in black caps,
 Periwigged heads, and a thousand other
 Poor, sweating human heads.
 Tell me, what signifies man?
 Whence does he come? Whither does he go?
 Who dwells yonder above the golden stars?’

 The waves murmur their eternal murmur,
 The winds blow, the clouds flow past.
 Cold and indifferent twinkle the stars,
 And a fool awaits an answer.”*

- Heinrich Heine²²²

²²² Heine 1982, 21.

1. “*Nihil humani a me alienum puto*”

Marx’s idea of humanity originated in the same ancient Hellenic philosophical tradition as his ontology. Throughout his work he described various aspects of the “human being” but the definition that most accurately captures his idea of humanity is that we are a “free” being when fully developed.²²³ This is fundamentally because we are a consciously “rational” being. With the development of our “*species-powers*” we are able to feel, think and act with knowledge of the “universal,” which is “reason,” as it pertains to all aspects of our life. Thus according to Marx the “five senses,” along with our “mental” and “practical senses,” can be more or less “rational.”²²⁴ As he put it, the “human” species has the potential to know “how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object,” which in his view applies to the ethical, aesthetic, and intellectual aspects of our life-activity (all of which are unique to “human” existence).²²⁵

This view of Marx’s owes much to his Aristotelianism and the Enlightenment thinkers who were also influenced by the Hellenic tradition. As Aristotle maintained, “reason more than anything else *is* [humanity].”²²⁶ The original ancient Greek word which is translated here as “reason” is *logos*, although it cannot be fully expressed by a single word in the English language. The idea of *logos* evokes the dual character of “Reason” as both the intelligible law of phenomena but also as a subjective capacity for thought and activity. Our inherent potential to develop this ‘rationality’ is the basis for Aristotle’s claim that “the good and the well is thought to reside in the function” of humanity which is “the activity of the soul which follows or implies

²²³ The notion of “full human development” arises in *Capital* and it is claimed that the goal of “the education of the future” is to produce “fully developed human beings” (Marx 1976, 533, 614).

²²⁴ Marx 1964, 141.

²²⁵ Marx 1964, 114.

²²⁶ Aristotle 1998, 266. Cf. Marx’s claim that “Human beings would have to be men of intellect” (Marx 1967, 205).

a rational principle” (*logos*).²²⁷ In other words, “human good” in Aristotle’s ethical philosophy is “activity of soul exhibiting excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in accordance with the best and most complete.”²²⁸ A “eudaimonic” life can be described as a flourishing life because it involves the development and enjoyment of the capacities—i.e., virtues²²⁹—required for actualizing this “principle” in our life-activity, in common with others who have also developed these capacities. An examination of the anthropological philosophy at the basis of Marx’s idea of a “free” life in “communist society” demonstrates that he was no stranger to the idea of “virtuosity.”²³⁰ In his view, a “free” life requires the development of the virtues required for knowing and actualizing “universal” intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic principles (e.g., the “laws of beauty”) in our life-activity.

Marx’s vision of freedom involves an understanding of how our developed “*species-powers*” coincide with “free” life-activity. A fundamental basis for distinguishing between humans and animals is the character of our life-activity. “The whole character of a species,” Marx claimed, “is contained in the character of its life activity.”²³¹ It is commonly argued that Marx thought our *productive* character is essential to this distinction,²³² but this is only partly accurate. It is evident that Marx thought human beings “begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence,” but this is because of the “*universal*” character of human labour.²³³ “Admittedly animals also produce,” Marx thought, but

²²⁷ Aristotle 1998, 12-13.

²²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²²⁹ “Virtue,” for Aristotle, “is a state of character concerned with choice...this being determined by a rational principle” (Aristotle 1998, 39). He wrote that “we are adapted by nature to receive” virtue but that it is “made perfect by habit” (Ibid., 28).

²³⁰ Marx 1973, 693.

²³¹ Marx 1964, 113.

²³² Karsten Struhl, for instance, claimed that “For Marx, the distinguishing feature of the human species is our unique form of production” (Struhl 2016, 83).

²³³ Marx and Engels 1998, 37.

the human species is unique insofar as it “produces universally” (and we have the potential to participate “universally” in other activities).²³⁴ Thus even though the way we produce is a unique form of life-activity, we are more accurately distinguished from animals by our potential for “universality” and the freedom that flows from it. As Marx claimed, “free, conscious activity is [humanity’s] species character,” and the *essential* difference between human beings and animals is that we are a “*universal* and therefore a free being.”²³⁵

There is not a firm consensus on the meaning of Marx’s idea of “universality” in scholarly circles. One of the more prevalent tendencies is to interpret it as a kind of all-roundedness of human capacities. Sayers writing provides a typical example:

“According to Marx, human beings are ‘universal’ beings, endowed with universal capacities and powers. To develop fully as human beings they must exercise these capacities and powers in an all-round way. Other animals, by contrast, are governed by particular drives and instincts; they have only limited powers and are capable of engaging only in limited and particular activities for particular purposes.”²³⁶

As Marx claimed, “the more universal [humanity] (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which [we live].... The universality of [humanity] appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature [our] *inorganic* body.”²³⁷ Thus Marx

²³⁴ Marx 1964, 113.

²³⁵ Ibid., 112.

²³⁶ Sayers 2011, 143. In short, “Human production is universal in its scope” (Ibid., 145). Sayers also defined the concept of ‘universality’ as a kind of generality or a characteristic that is common to us all: “It is quite evident that there are certain needs and other characteristics which are common to all human beings, pretty well regardless of their particular social or historical situation, and it is equally evident that Marx recognizes this. For example, the need for food is clearly a human universal.... This basic need for food is not a historical phenomenon, it is a universal and relatively unchanging feature of the human condition due to our biological constitution” (Sayers 1998, 151).

²³⁷ Marx 1964, 112.

did in fact describe “universality” in the colloquial sense of all-round development,²³⁸ but what is here a matter of emphasis should not overshadow the richness of Marx’s meaning. As a basis for *freedom*, “universality” must be understood as that which is “universal” in the sense of “reason” or “*logos*,” although the “universality” that Marx associates with humanity is connected to the idea of all-round development nonetheless. As Jean Vanier explained, virtue is “a human being’s capacity to act well, think well, or produce a good work. It implies excellence.”²³⁹ Insofar as “the universality of individual needs [and] capacities” are the “capabilities of [the] species,” they are “rational,” and “the totally developed individual” is an individual that is both virtuous and developed in an all-sided way.²⁴⁰ Marx also referred to this individuality as “the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption.”²⁴¹

This two-fold meaning of “universality” as “rational” and “total” development is evident in the following passage from Marx’s 1844 ‘Paris manuscripts’. He claimed that an animal

“produces one-sidedly, whilst [humanity] produces universally.... An animal produces only itself, whilst [humanity] reproduces the whole of nature.... An animal forms only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst [humanity] knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object.”²⁴²

²³⁸ This sense of the term “universality” also enters into Marx’s social critique. For example: “If the circumstances in which the individual lives allow him only the [one]-sided development of one quality at the expense of all the rest, [if] they give him the material and time to develop only that one quality, then this individual achieves only a one-sided, crippled development” (Marx and Engels 1998, 280).

²³⁹ Vanier 2001, 19-20.

²⁴⁰ Marx 1973, 488; Marx 1967, 467, 618.

²⁴¹ Marx 1973, 325.

²⁴² Marx 1964, 113-114. Compare Hegel’s claim that “Animals find what they need for the satisfaction of their wants immediately before them; human beings, by contrast, relate to the means for the satisfaction of their wants

Acting and producing with knowledge of the “inherent standard” evokes the idea of our “nature” as a “rational” being, and as Marx’s work matured there was no break from this idea that the essentially “human” character of our productive activity—and our life-activity generally—is our ability to direct ourselves in accordance with “logos.” In *Capital*, for instance, Marx defined human labour as activity involving “mind,” and the way he elaborates our purposefulness is more clearly associated with the activity of “self-conscious reason”:

“At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act.... [A] purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work.”²⁴³

“An instrument of labour is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object. He makes use of the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substances in order to set them to work on

as something that they themselves bring forth and shape. Thus, even in what is here external, [humanity] is related to [itself]” (Hegel 1991b, 62). Kant also shared a similar view: “Reason is the ability of a creature to extend the rules and ends of the use of all its powers far beyond its natural instincts, and reason knows no limits in the scope of its projects. Reason itself does not function according to instinct, but rather requires experimentation, practice and, instruction in order to advance gradually from one stage of insight to the next” (Kant 2006, 5). Cf. Rousseau’s claim that “Man, dispersed among the beasts, would observe and imitate their activities and so assimilate their instincts, with this added advantage that while every other species has only its own instinct, man, having perhaps none which is peculiar to himself, appropriates every instinct” (Rousseau 1984, 81-82).

²⁴³ Marx 1976, 283-284.

other substances as instruments of his power, and in accordance with his purposes.”²⁴⁴

In a footnote to the second passage cited above, Marx invokes Hegel’s idea that “Reason is as *cunning* as it is *mighty*.”²⁴⁵ This indicates that Marx wanted to express the “fact that the subjective purpose, as the power over these processes (in which the *objective* gets used up through mutual friction and sublates itself), keeps itself *outside of them* and *preserves itself* in them.”²⁴⁶ In other words, Marx was claiming that it is potentially free insofar as our subjective purpose is “universal” or “rational” and we have developed the knowledge and ability to carry it out.²⁴⁷

The “universal” character of human production is thus not specifically its *social* character, although this is nevertheless a fundamental aspect of it in Marx’s writing. He makes this distinction in what became the third volume of *Capital* under Engel’s editorship. He argues that we “must distinguish...between universal labour and communal labour” because even though

“both play their part in the production process, and merge into one another,...they are each different as well. Universal labour is all scientific work, all discovery and invention. It is brought about partly by the cooperation of men now living, but partly

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 285. Cf. McCarney: “The labour process is inherently purposive and the workers may be thought of as exercising reason in the choice of means to realize their purposes in it” (McCarney 1990, 134).

²⁴⁵ Hegel 1991b, 284. “Its cunning,” according to Hegel, “generally consists in the mediating activity which, while it lets objects act upon one another according to their own nature, and wear each other out, executes only *its* purpose without itself mingling in the process” (Ibid.).

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Knowledge of Kant’s work is also relevant for interpreting these passages in *Capital*. In his *Critique of Judgement* he defined “art” (and human “labour”) in essentially the same way (and he also used the analogy of a bee): “By right it is only production through freedom, i.e. through an act of will that places reason at the basis of its action, that should be termed art. For, although we are pleased to call what bees produce (their regularly constructed cells) a work of art, we only do so on the strength of an analogy with art; that is to say, as soon as we call to mind that no rational deliberation forms the basis of their labour, we say at once that it is the product of their nature (of instinct), and it is only to their creator that we ascribe it as art” (Kant 2007, 132).

also by building on earlier work. Communal labour, however, simply involves direct cooperation of individuals.”²⁴⁸

However, Marx’s emphasis on “scientific work” (i.e., predominantly *intellectual* activity) is somewhat misleading because our “universal” character encompasses our “practical” capacities as well. As Marx claimed, we are “affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with *all* [our] senses.”²⁴⁹ His idea of the “human nature of the senses”²⁵⁰ includes the “mental” and “practical senses” associated with aesthetic objects and ethical experience/practice. Thus unlike other animals we are able to produce in accordance with the “laws of beauty” and direct ourselves in accordance with the principle of “justice.”

Marx’s idea of the “mental” and “practical senses” is one of many indications that he believed we have ethical capacities that can be “universally developed.” For instance, he claimed that “In so far as man, and hence also his feeling, etc., is *human*, the affirmation of the object by another is likewise his own gratification.”²⁵¹ Marx’s work indicates that he thought there is a ‘universal standard’ (“rational principle”) for ethical activity and experience that we can know, feel, and act in accordance with, i.e., once we develop the virtue for it.²⁵² Aristotle’s influence on Marx in this respect is also evident and familiarity with the idea of “moral virtue” is helpful for interpreting the philosophical basis of Marx’s idea of developed “practical senses” like “will”

²⁴⁸ Marx 1981, 199.

²⁴⁹ Marx 1964, 140.

²⁵⁰ “It is obvious,” Marx wrote, “that the *human* eye enjoys things in a way different from the crude, non-human eye; the human ear different from the crude ear, etc.” (Ibid., 140).

²⁵¹ Marx 1964, 165. Cf. Hegel’s claim that “If feelings are of the right sort it is because of their quality or content—which is right only so far as it is intrinsically universal or has its source in the thinking mind” (Hegel 1971, 231).

²⁵² Hegel elaborated a similar idea in a discussion on “Law” and “Morality.” He described them as “universal existences, objects and aims” which “are discovered only by the activity of thought, separating itself from the merely sensuous, and developing itself, in opposition thereto; and which must on the other hand, be introduced into and incorporated with the originally sensuous will, and that contrarily to its natural inclination” (Hegel 1956, 41).

and “love.” Aristotle distinguished between “desiderative reason” and “ratiocinative desire.” For the sake of clarity it is worth quoting Aristotle at length:

“What affirmation and negation are in thinking, pursuit and avoidance are in desire; so that since moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, and choice is deliberate desire, therefore both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts. Now this kind of intellect and of truth is practical; of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor productive, the good and the bad state are truth and falsity respectively (for this is the work of everything intellectual); while of the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth in agreement with right desire.

The origin of action—its efficient, not its final cause—is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without reason and intellect or without a moral state; for good action and its opposite cannot exist without a combination of intellect and character. Intellect itself, however, moves nothing, but only the intellect which aims at an end and is practical; for this rules the productive intellect as well, since everyone who makes for an end, and that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only an end in a particular relation, and the end of a particular operation)—only that which is *done* is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this. Hence choice is either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire, and such an origin of action is man.”²⁵³

²⁵³ Aristotle 1998, 138-9.

For Marx, truly “human” purposes express what Aristotle here describes as “ratiocinative desire.” In the next chapter it will be shown that, in Marx’s view, the potentially “free” character of our social life-activity depends on the development of “moral virtue” for the realization of “justice” (which is a “universal” ethical “principle”), defined by Aristotle as the practice of “complete virtue” in relations with others; and the fifth chapter will show that Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity is an individuality which is advanced in the development of “moral virtue” as a result of certain features of their life-activity, and that this subjective capacity is integral for initiating the establishment of a “free” society.

2. Human Self-Creation and the Role of Labour in Our Transformative Relationship with Nature

In Marx’s writing revolutionary subjectivity is depicted as a form of individuality which emerges amid the activities and relations of the productive process in capitalist society. A successful revolution which marks the transition to truly “human” life is the result of a broader historical process of “human” development out of our bestial origin in nature, from which we emerge with only the potential to become free.²⁵⁴ According to Marx this process is driven from the outset by fundamental features of our socio-productive activity.²⁵⁵ In his view the labour process is the locus of the dialectic between human activity as natural activity and the natural activity of humanity in which nature is turning into humanity as humanity is transforming nature and becoming consciously free.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ “Freedom,” Hegel claimed, “as the *ideal* of that which is original and natural, does not exist *as original and natural*. Rather it must be first sought out and won; and that by an incalculable medial discipline of the intellectual and moral powers. The state of Nature is, therefore, predominantly that of injustice and violence, of untamed natural impulses, of inhuman deeds and feelings” (Hegel 1956, 40-41).

²⁵⁵ Marx’s view of this process will be explored further in Chapter Four.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Engels’ claim that humanity is “that mammal in which nature attains consciousness of itself” (Engels 1940, 17).

We participate in this fundamentally social life-activity initially only to satisfy immediate “natural necessity” and according to Marx the growth of our “species-powers” is an unintended result of it.²⁵⁷ Through labour we alter the natural world—as we find it altered by socio-historical activity—and ourselves as well. As Marx claimed in *Capital*,

“Labour is...a process by which [humanity], through [its] own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between [itself] and nature. [We set] in motion the natural forces which belong to [our] own body...in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to [our] own needs. Through this movement [we act] upon external nature and [change] it, and in this way [we] simultaneously [change our] own nature. [We develop] the potentialities slumbering within nature, and [subject] the play of its forces to [our] own sovereign power.”²⁵⁸

A fundamental aspect of Marx’s notion of humanity is that we are self-created.²⁵⁹ From his perspective, real self-determination essentially involves self-creation.²⁶⁰ Humanity is able to have a free relationship with nature—in which we are self-determined but not independent of nature

²⁵⁷ He thought that the initial impetus for the growth of our consciousness (and language) was the necessity of working collectively to satisfy the ‘material’ needs associated with our natural-physical life (Marx and Engels 1998, 37). Cf. his claim in the *Grundrisse* that “Not only do the objective conditions change in the act of production, but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language” (Marx 1973, 494).

²⁵⁸ Marx 1976, 283.

²⁵⁹ He claimed that “the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labour” (Marx 1964, 145).

²⁶⁰ “A *being* only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his *existence* to himself” (Ibid., 144). Cf. Engels’ claim that “Man is the sole animal capable of working his way out of the merely animal state—his normal state is one appropriate to his consciousness, *one to be created by himself*” (Engels 1940, 187). McCarney attempted to elaborate this aspect of Marx’s work in relation to Hegel’s philosophy: “Freedom, [Hegel] tells us, is ‘self-sufficient being’, and so ‘If I am self-sufficient, I am also free.’ Thus, the basic idea of freedom is of a life which is at the subject’s own disposal, determined by self and not by whatever is external to and other than self. Such a conception of freedom as self-determination is not only in keeping with everyday thinking but also captures the basis for the mainstream treatment of the topic by philosophers since the Greeks” (McCarney 1991, 23).

per se—insofar as we develop our “*species-powers*” because nature is governed by ‘natural laws’ which are “reason.”²⁶¹ In this way the human being—as “self-conscious reason”—is fully developed nature. Marx articulated this dialectic of nature and humanity in the following passage:

“The *human* essence of nature primarily exists only for *social* man, because only here is nature a *link* with *man*, as his existence for others and their existence for him, as the life-element of human actuality—only here is nature the *foundation* of man’s own *human* existence. Only here has the *natural existence* of man become his *human* existence and nature become human. Thus *society* is the comprehended, essential unity of man with nature, the true resurrection of nature, the fulfilled naturalism of man and humanism of nature.”²⁶²

With the growth of our inherent capacity for “universally” conscious labour, the development of productive technology and organization, etc., we are able to overcome the alien and dominating character of nature overtime.²⁶³ As Marx put it, “the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process”; e.g., we insert “the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between [ourselves] and inorganic nature, mastering it.”²⁶⁴ Marx does not suggest that we will be entirely independent from the necessity

²⁶¹ Cf. Hegel’s claim that “Nature is an embodiment of Reason,” and it is therefore “unchangeably subordinate to universal laws” (Hegel 1956, 12).

²⁶² Marx 1967, 305-6.

²⁶³ Cf. his claim that “nature becomes one of the organs of [humanity’s] activity, which [we annex] to [our] own bodily organs, adding stature to [ourselves] in spite of the Bible” (Marx 1976, 285).

²⁶⁴ Marx 1973, 704-706. Cf. McCarney’s claim that the “rationality which is a defining feature of human labour must have a central place in [the] process of [human] self-creation. At least part of its significance lies in the internal connection with the development of the human capacity to cope with the external world. This development is, for both Marx and Hegel, an integral part of humanity’s self-creation, and, in another aspect, simply is the growth of the productive forces” (McCarney 1990, 134-135).

for instrumental activity associated with our organic body, although this does not necessarily entail activity determined by something other than the human ‘self’. Instead, freedom—in an “advanced phase of communist society”—can be characterized as being in tune with nature and adapting it as much as possible to our “universal” life-activity rather than being subjected to its unconquered might,²⁶⁵ but the “natural necessity” associated with the maintenance of our life at a desirable standard (or at all) will remain because we are always internally related to nature.

This transformation and control over forces of the natural world through labour involves the modification of features of our own natural-physical being throughout the historical process. Marx imagined “the full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity’s own nature.”²⁶⁶ Hegel’s philosophy was an important influence on Marx in this regard,²⁶⁷ although this Hegelian view of the “self-creation” of humanity comes with a terrible catch. “At the same pace that mankind masters nature,” Marx claimed, “man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy.”²⁶⁸ Appropriating Hegel, Marx made “estrangement” a key feature of the social labour process (throughout the “prehistory of human society”) which provides the dynamism whereby “reason” becomes increasingly conscious and we create the objective and subjective conditions for a life in which the full development of humanity is consciously pursued as an end-in-itself.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Hence Marx’s claim that “communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man” (Marx 1964, 135).

²⁶⁶ Marx 1973, 488. Cf. Fromm’s claim that humanity, “while like all other creatures is subject to forces which determine [it], is the only creature endowed with reason, the only being who is capable of understanding the very forces which [it] is subjected to and who by [its] understanding can take an active part in [its] own fate and strengthen those elements which strive for the good” (Fromm 1947, 234).

²⁶⁷ In the *Phenomenology*, for instance, Hegel claims that in the labour process we rid ourselves of our “attachment to natural existence in every single detail” by “working on it” (Marx 1977, 117).

²⁶⁸ Marx 2010b, 299.

²⁶⁹ Marx 1977, 22. Marx’s idea of “estrangement” will be explored further in Chapter Four.

3. Marx's Aristotelian Idea of "Nature" and the Paradox of Humanity's Historical Genesis

The question as to whether an idea of "human nature" exists in Marx's work is controversial. Some interpreters claim that it does not exist while those who claim it does often differ in what it supposedly is, and the different approaches in the literature on the topic tend to emphasize various elements abstracted from Marx's general idea. Those who claim that Marx did not have an idea of 'human nature' tend to invoke his emphasis on the historical diversity and determination of definite cultural forms of social character and this is contrasted to the idea of a "universal human nature." From the outset this view is inconsistent because it nevertheless proposes an idea of "human nature," i.e., something intrinsically "human"; and ultimately, as Norman Geras argued, "if diversity in the character of human beings is in large measure set down by Marx to historical variation," the fact that they "have a history" is explained "in turn by some of their general and constant, intrinsic, constitutional characteristics; in short by their human nature."²⁷⁰

Indeed, Marx distinguished between "human nature in general" and "human nature as historically modified in each epoch."²⁷¹ This is relatively well-recognized in contemporary literature,²⁷² although the distinction continues to be a source of difficulty because Marx also evidently thought that "all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature."²⁷³ The paradoxical character of Marx's philosophical position on this matter has contributed to the interpretation that he thought "human nature" is ultimately determined by historically fluid "social relations." Sayers writing provides a typical illustration here as well:

²⁷⁰ Geras 1983, 67.

²⁷¹ Marx 1976, 759.

²⁷² Karsten Struhl, for example, claimed that "Marx's *historical* concept of human nature is grounded in a robust *trans-historical* concept of human nature" (Struhl 2016, 81).

²⁷³ Marx and Engels 1976, 192.

“Human nature necessarily exists in a specific social and historical context, and social relations are always the result of specific and historically determined forms of human nature.... Human beings are social and historical beings through and through.”²⁷⁴

This is a misrepresentation of Marx’s idea that “human nature” is “trans-historical” and yet takes on a diversity of forms through the historical process. His idea of “nature” in this instance is like Aristotle’s idea of “each thing’s nature” as “the character it has when its coming-into-being has been completed.”²⁷⁵ On the basis of Marx’s ontology, social relations (i.e., the “ensemble of social relations”) are conceived as *internal* relations. On this basis the paradoxical nature of Marx’s claim that the “nature which develops in human history—the genesis of human society—is [humanity’s] *real* nature” is coherent.²⁷⁶ Thus although it is evident that Marx thought socio-historical life is uniquely “human” and that these processes are involved in determining our identity, in light of what the present analysis has demonstrated it is also evident

²⁷⁴ Sayers 1998, 150. “Marx’s approach,” he claims, “is historical and relative, not trans-historical and absolute” (Ibid., 137). Sayers associated “the notion of a universal ‘human essence’” with the idea of “an unchanging set of human potentialities” and contrasted it to the idea that “not only needs but also powers and potentialities are in a process of social and historical development” (Ibid.). He ultimately maintains an inconsistent view: “it is clear that there are universal and trans-historical, relatively unchanging human characteristics and, in that sense, a universal human nature” (Ibid., 151).

²⁷⁵ Aristotle 1998b, 3.

²⁷⁶ Marx 1964, 143. This becoming of “human nature” is a problem for the abstractive intellect that Hegel called “the understanding” because to this consciousness it is as though we are positing the non-existence of humanity while simultaneously positing its existence—as if a grapevine is not a grapevine until it has grown grapes. Cf. the following passage from Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts:

“*Generatio aequivoca* is the only practical refutation of the theory of creation.... You will...ask: Who begot the first man, and nature as a whole? I can only answer you: Your question is itself a product of abstraction. Ask yourself how you arrived at that question. Ask yourself whether your question is not posed from a standpoint to which I cannot reply, because it is wrongly put. Ask yourself whether that progression as such exists for a reasonable mind. When you ask about the creation of nature and man, you are abstracting, in so doing, from man and nature. You postulate them as *non-existent*, and yet you want me to prove them to you as *existing*. Now I say to you: Give up your abstraction and you will also give up your question. Or if you want to hold on to your abstraction, then be consistent, and if you think of man and nature as *non-existent*, then think of yourself as non-existent, for you too are surely nature and man. Don’t think, don’t ask me, for as soon as you think and ask, your *abstraction* from the existence of nature and man has no meaning. Or are you such an egotist that you conceive everything as nothing, and yet want yourself to exist? ...[For] the socialist man the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labour, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his *birth* through himself, *of the process of his creation*” (Marx 1964, 144-145).

that he did not reduce “human nature” to the fluctuating idiosyncrasies of character arising from shifting socio-historical relations.

For Marx, our “nature” is not begun anew in each era; in his view, all historical variations are definite expressions of the development of our “universal human nature.” For example, he considered different “religions as nothing more than *different stages in the evolution of the human spirit*, as different snake skins shed by *history*” (and humanity is “the snake that wore them”).²⁷⁷ This bears the influence of Hegel’s notion of gradations in ‘Spirit’s consciousness of freedom’ which he thought is expressed in all moments of social life (art, science, politics, etc.).²⁷⁸ The “ensemble of social relationships” is thus also a manifestation of the “human spirit” and the collective “universal” powers of human beings at a definite stage of development. Indeed, in Marx’s view all products of our activity are an objectification of the degrees of development of our “essential powers”; e.g., the productive forces, which are “the power of knowledge objectified.”²⁷⁹

The “state power does not hover in mid-air,”²⁸⁰ as it were, but neither do the individuals who the state rests on. In secondary literature it is generally accepted that Marx thought our existence is determined in a substantial way by the conditions and relations associated with our fundamental life-activity in each definite form of society.²⁸¹ The “attitude of the merchant,” for

²⁷⁷ Marx 1994, 3.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Marx’s claim that “In the case of an individual...whose life embraces a wide circle of varied activities and practical relations to the world, and who, therefore, lives a many-sided life, thought has the same character of universality as every other manifestation of his life” (Marx and Engels 1998, 280-81).

²⁷⁹ Marx 1973, 62. Marx claimed that the “history” of the “development of the productive forces” corresponds “at every stage” with “the history of the development of the forces of the individuals themselves” (Marx and Engels 1998, 91).

²⁸⁰ Marx 2010b, 238. Cf. Aristotle’s claim that the “city-state is excellent” because “the citizens who participate in the constitution are excellent” (Aristotle 1998b, 213).

²⁸¹ Cf. Marx’s claim from 1845 when he and Engels were attempting to articulate the premises of what became known as the ‘materialist conception of history’: “By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life.... This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction

example, “depends entirely on the degree of development of the capitalist mode of production and not on his own will.”²⁸² But Marx’s perspective is often misunderstood and it is not uncommon to encounter misinterpretations of his idea of the ‘Base-Superstructure’²⁸³ relation which excessively emphasize the determination of human life by the “economic structure of society” at the expense of his idea of human subjectivity, reducing the “human mind” to the status of an epiphenomenon and ultimately discarding what Marx thinks is our “human nature.” Alan Wood summed up the prevailing view succinctly (in relation to the question of “moral beliefs”):

“According to historical materialism, people’s moral beliefs and the motives to adhere to them are part of the ‘ideological superstructure’ of society.... Historical materialism proposes to explain the social influence of moral beliefs by the way in which they contribute to the basic economic tendencies in the society in which they are found. And it proposes to account for the content of these beliefs by the way it helps to stabilize a social system or promote class interests.”²⁸⁴

Wood’s interpretation leaves out the fact that from Marx’s perspective the “social system,” “class interests,” and the social relations of production are always an expression of the collective “*universal*” powers of human beings at a definite stage of development. Marx emphasized the

of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals...a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production” (Marx and Engels 1998, 37).

²⁸² Marx 1981, 421-422.

²⁸³ He claimed that the “totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life constitutes the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 1977, 20-21).

²⁸⁴ Wood 2004, 132.

definite character of historically specific forms of society because it is necessary for social analysis and critique. Thus Wood's claim that "Marx proposes to explain the character of a society's legal system, politics and moral or religious beliefs by showing how they serve to sanction its social relations" is not entirely incorrect, but it only partially captures Marx's meaning.²⁸⁵

The excessive emphasis which is often placed on the 'economic base' is associated with the erroneous opinion that his idea of the establishment of moral/ethical values is based on a kind of economic determinism. If this were the case, his idea that we can actualize self-determined "universal" values would be meaningless because these values would always be given. Marx's writing indicates that, in his view, there are moral/ethical values which we can know through our life-activity as "universally developed individuals" and that they are a vital component of free life which is our 'universal nature.'

Marx thought that one of our defining characteristics is our self-creation but this aspect of our "nature" is only substantially achieved in a "rational state of society," when "reason" *consciously* directs the world.²⁸⁶ He perceived a time "when the objective world becomes everywhere for [humanity] in society the world of [humanity's] essential powers—human reality."²⁸⁷ In his view the realization of "human nature" is achieved in the life lived in an "advanced phase of communist society." An analysis of his vision of this life is essential for comprehending his idea of revolutionary subjectivity because revolutionary subjects are going to initiate the establishment of it; and even though they will not experience the flourishing of our "human nature," Marx thought that their life-activity and experience in capitalism would develop

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 105.

²⁸⁶ Marx 2010c, 88.

²⁸⁷ Marx 1964, 140.

their consciousness of it nonetheless. He claimed, for example, that “English and French workers have formed associations in which they exchange opinions not only on their immediate needs as *workers*, but as *human beings*.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Marx 1975b, 52.

Chapter Three – “Communist Society”

*“I dream’d that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the people of that city,
All in their looks and words.”*

- Walt Whitman²⁸⁹

1. “Universally Developed Individuals” and the General Character of “Communist Society”

Marx’s statements about his vision of the “communist organization of society” indicate that he thought it would enable us to live what Aristotle described as “an active life of the element that has a rational principle.”²⁹⁰ This life-activity actualizes “universal” intellectual, aesthetic and ethical principles: “truth,” “beauty” and “love.” The latter will be elaborated below in conjunction with Aristotle’s idea of “justice,” which is the practice of “complete virtue”²⁹¹ in relations with others, and his idea of true “friendship,” which is the mutually recognized and reciprocal practice of virtue when the requisite degree of intimacy is present.²⁹² This ethical character of social relations is vital for the functioning of the society “in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”²⁹³ Marx’s idea of “an

²⁸⁹ Whitman 1975, 164.

²⁹⁰ Aristotle 1998, 13. Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “political communities must be taken to exist for the sake of [beautiful] actions” (Aristotle 1998b, 81).

²⁹¹ According to Aristotle, “This form of justice...is complete virtue, although not without qualification, but in relation to our neighbour. And therefore justice is often thought to be the greatest of virtues, and ‘neither evening nor morning star’ is so wonderful; and proverbially ‘in justice is every virtue comprehended’. And it is complete virtue in its fullest sense because it is the actual exercise of complete virtue. It is complete because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbour also; for many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in their relations to their neighbour” (Aristotle 1998, 108).

²⁹² Of course, Marx rejected Aristotle’s position on ‘natural’ slaves, his xenophobia and his sexism.

²⁹³ Marx 2010, 87.

association of free” individuals “working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force”²⁹⁴ indicates that he developed a more concrete understanding of how “reason” *consciously* “directs the world” as his thought developed: when “the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature,” bring “it under their common control” in “conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.”²⁹⁵ Indeed, he described an “advanced phase of communist society” as a mode of life in which “the practical relations of everyday life” between individuals and between humanity and nature “present themselves” in “a transparent and rational form.”²⁹⁶ In this kind of life “the interconnection of production as a whole” is a law which, “being grasped and therefore mastered by” the “combined reason” of “the agents of production,” “brings the productive process under their common control.”²⁹⁷

The “communist” mode of production aims at the “free development of all abilities of the whole” person and it is predicated on the perfect practice of virtue.²⁹⁸ “Universally developed individuals” would populate this society and experience truly “free activity” which, according to Marx, is “for the communists the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities.”²⁹⁹ The “free and full development” of the individual is “based on the universal development of [all] individuals,” i.e., on fostering their “universal relations,” “all-round needs and universal capacities.”³⁰⁰ According to Marx the desire for such a life was already

²⁹⁴ Marx 1976, 171.

²⁹⁵ Marx 1981, 959.

²⁹⁶ Marx 1976, 173.

²⁹⁷ Marx 1981, 365. Cf. Hegel’s claim that “it is the nature of humanity to press onward to agreement with others; human nature only really exists in an achieved community of minds” (Hegel 1977, 43).

²⁹⁸ Chief among the virtues are those of a “moral” and “intellectual” sort. Aristotle claimed that “the work of [humanity] is achieved only in accordance with practical wisdom as well as with moral virtue; for virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means” (Aristotle 1998, 155).

²⁹⁹ Marx and Engels 1998, 242; Marx 1973, 162.

³⁰⁰ Marx 1973, 487, 158.

manifesting in capitalist society. He claimed that “workers assert in their communist propaganda that” the “task of every person is to achieve all-round development of all his abilities, including, for example, the ability to think.”³⁰¹ Thus he imagined “communist society” as a social order “where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes” because “society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow.”³⁰² It must be reemphasized that Marx meant “universal” not merely in the sense of ‘all-round’ development but also in the sense of “rational.” The idea of all-around development is indeed present in Marx’s notion of “universally developed individuals” but as a condition of freedom this “universal” development entails virtuosity. As Marx claimed,

“Even if in certain social conditions, everyone were an excellent painter, that would by no means exclude the possibility of each of them being also an original painter.... In any case, with a communist organisation of society, there disappears the subordination of the artist to local and national narrowness, which arises entirely from division of labour, and also the subordination of the individual to some definite art, making him exclusively a painter, sculptor, etc.; the very name amply expresses the narrowness of his professional development and his dependence on division of

³⁰¹ Marx and Engels 1998, 309. “The all-round realisation of the individual will only cease to be conceived as an ideal...when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual is under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire” (Ibid.).

³⁰² Ibid., 53. Engels, too, maintained that life in what Marx described as “an advanced phase of communist society” presupposes the all-round development of individuals: “Industry carried on in common and according to plan by the whole of society presupposes moreover people of all-round development, capable of surveying the entire system of production.... [The] communist organisation of society will give its members the chance of an all-round exercise of abilities that have received all-round development” (Marx and Engels 1976, 353).

labour. In a communist society, there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities.”³⁰³

2. Realms of Life-Activity and the Character of Social Relations in “Communist Society”

The stable social harmony that Marx thought would characterize “an advanced phase of communist society” derives from the “full development of human mastery over the forces of” our “own nature.”³⁰⁴ This “mastery” is expressed in the character of communist society’s activities and relations. Marx distinguished between two essential realms of activity within this society: the “realm of necessity” and the “true realm of freedom.”³⁰⁵ His language may be misleading because both of these realms are moments of a “free” life. Aside from the fact that they are determined by “self-conscious reason,” a fundamental reason why they are free is because they embody relations equivalent to Aristotelian “justice” and true “friendship.” In the words of a poet, they can be described as

*Realms where the air we breathe is love.*³⁰⁶

The “realm of necessity” involves all instrumental activity, i.e., for needs arising from the natural-biological aspect of our being, including the means for this activity itself, as well as for the needs arising from the “true realm of freedom.” It both develops and requires the virtues of “universally developed individuals.” On the basis of “just” social relations, goods which are socially produced are socially distributed for all to achieve the all-round cultivation of their

³⁰³ Marx 1973, 417-418.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 488.

³⁰⁵ Marx 1981, 959.

³⁰⁶ Shelley 1956, 146.

abilities and talents.³⁰⁷ The “realm of necessity” would be carried out with the least possible amount of time and energy expenditure, which makes it “attractive work.” We would minimize the amount of time and energy required for it in order to maximize time and energy for fully “free,” “end in itself” activity in the “realm of freedom.”³⁰⁸ Marx thought that “the realm of natural necessity expands with [our] development.”³⁰⁹ This would lead to hitherto unrivalled development of the productive powers of society because he considered “the development of the individual” as “a force of production” and since “communist society” is premised on the “saving of labour time” which is “equal to an increase of free time, that is time for the full development of the individual,” this “in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power.”³¹⁰ Thus in this mode of life “necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual” and

“the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, disposable time will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time.”³¹¹

‘Free time’ in “communist society” is “both idle time and time for higher activity.”³¹² Such “higher activity” is the time spent engaging in and enjoying the activities associated with the

³⁰⁷ Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “if all were to strive towards what is [beautiful] and strain every nerve to do the [most beautiful] deeds, everything would be as it should be for the common weal, and everyone would secure for himself the goods that are greatest, since virtue is the greatest of goods” (Aristotle 1998, 236-7).

³⁰⁸ Marx 1973, 611.

³⁰⁹ Marx 1981, 959.

³¹⁰ Marx 1973, 711. It would be a time “when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly” (Marx 2010c, 347).

³¹¹ Marx 1973, 708.

³¹² Ibid., 712.

actualization of virtuous aesthetic and intellectual principles in “the true realm of freedom.” The “free development of individualities” and “the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum” is integral for “that development of human energy which is an end in itself” because it “corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.”³¹³ This “higher activity” is an end-in-itself³¹⁴ and its “rational” character is the basis for Marx’s claim that really free labour “cannot become play.”³¹⁵ As he claimed, “Really free working, e.g. composing, is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion,” because we have to produce in accordance with the “inherent standard of the object.”³¹⁶ Compare Kant’s claim that

“in all free arts something of a compulsory character is still required...(e.g., in the poetic art there must be correctness and wealth of language, likewise, prosody and metre). For not a few leaders of a newer school believe that the best way to promote a free art is to sweep away all restraint and convert it from labour into mere play.”³¹⁷

Ultimately, Marx thought that “Our productions would be so many mirrors reflecting our essential nature” because they would involve an objectification of the “universal.”³¹⁸

The “realm of natural necessity” has a liberating character in such circumstances because it is determined by “reason.” Marcuse denied this and his view was uncritically accepted by many critical theorists. “No matter how justly and rationally the material production may be

³¹³ Marx 1973, 706; Marx 1981, 959. Cf. Wood 2004, 29.

³¹⁴ Aristotle maintained that “those activities are desirable in themselves from which nothing is sought beyond the activity. And of this nature virtuous actions are thought to be; for to do [beautiful] and good deeds is a thing desirable for its own sake” (Aristotle 1998, 261).

³¹⁵ Marx 1973, 712.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 611.

³¹⁷ Kant 2007, 133-4.

³¹⁸ Marx 1994, 53.

organized,” he claimed, “it can never be a realm of freedom and gratification.”³¹⁹ Insofar as the working day “would remain a day of unfreedom, rational but not free,” Marcuse thought that “real human freedom would prevail only outside the entire sphere of socially necessary labour.”³²⁰ For Marx, on the contrary, even though the “realm of natural necessity” remains a realm of instrumental necessity and does not become an end-in-itself, i.e., even though we would not spend unnecessary time labouring in this realm because of its instrumental nature, this is not enough to qualify it as simply unfree. It can be carried out “universally”—in both senses of this term—and undertaken within “free” social relations (“free association”). Furthermore, in step with the growth of scientific knowledge and technical aptitude as it relates to the production process, it increasingly requires less of our direct involvement as we develop the technological basis of production³²¹ and discover new and better ways of carrying it out rationally, in harmony with the cosmic flow of life.³²² It would also be carried out in accordance with the “laws of beauty” (e.g., food can be made to taste good with the practice of culinary arts).³²³ In short, instrumental labour that cannot be overcome would be done “rationally” and thus as freely as possible.

In these conditions “labour would be a *free manifestation of life* and an *enjoyment of life*.”³²⁴ As Marx put it, labour becomes “a vital need” because “the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims

³¹⁹ Marcuse 1962, 142.

³²⁰ Marcuse 1969, 21.

³²¹ Even Marcuse claimed that “the development of the productive forces beyond their capitalist organization suggests the possibility of freedom *within* the realm of necessity” (Ibid.).

³²² Marx thought that “the process” of “material production” is “the life process in the realm of the social” (Marx 1976, 990).

³²³ Marcuse wanted an aesthetic ethos to permeate a liberated society, but in his view art should become mere play.

³²⁴ Marx 1994, 53.

which the individual [themselves] posits—hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labour.”³²⁵ Engels elaborated this vision in his claim that “productive labour, instead of being a means to the subjection of men, will become a means to their emancipation, by giving each individual the opportunity to develop and exercise all his faculties, physical and mental, in all directions; in which, therefore, productive labour will become a pleasure instead of a burden.”³²⁶

The ethical character of social relations in “communist society” is essential for the freedom embodied in the activity of instrumental social labour because it is premised on conscious “reciprocal love” (as articulated in the Aristotelian sense above) even if it is not intimate enough to be mutually recognized.³²⁷ From the outset, activity in the “realm of natural necessity” actualizes a “just” distribution principle: “From each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs.”³²⁸ However, aside from being an instrumental necessity, “justice” is also an end-in-itself and it is therefore essential for freedom in a twofold sense: 1) it is indispensable for self-realization in an instrumental way because everyone is provided with what they need to become “universally developed,”³²⁹ and 2) it is desirable for “universally developed individuals” as an end-in-itself and therefore an integral component of activity in “the true realm of freedom.” Marx claimed that in conditions that are intimate enough for mutual recognition, “I would [be]...the *mediator* between you and the species and you would [experience]...me as a reintegration of our own nature and a necessary part of yourself; I would [be]...affirmed in your

³²⁵ Marx 2010c, 347; Marx 1973, 611.

³²⁶ Engels 1934, 322.

³²⁷ Marx 1964, 169.

³²⁸ Marx 2010c, 347.

³²⁹ According to Marx, “the genuine and free development of individuals” that takes place in “communist society” is “determined precisely by the connection of individuals...which consists partly in the economic prerequisites and partly in the necessary solidarity of the free development of all,” and “in the universal character of the activity of individuals” (Marx and Engels 1998, 465).

thought as well as your love.... What happens so far as I am concerned would also apply to you.”³³⁰ Freedom is fundamentally intersubjective in the dual sense that its content is “*universal*” (e.g., “the laws of beauty”) and that the free experience of the other is necessary to complete the free experience of each individual.

This fragmentary writing can be elaborated in conjunction with a similar account of freedom in Hegel’s philosophy. According to Hegel “true freedom...consists in my identity with the other” whereby “I am only truly free when the other is also free and is recognized by me as free.”³³¹ Marx’s vision of “communist” social relations indicates that individuals would have developed what Hegel called “Universal self-consciousness” which is “the affirmative awareness of self in an other self” whereby “each has ‘real’ universality in the shape of reciprocity, so far as each knows itself recognized in the other freeman, and is aware of this in so far as it recognizes the other and knows him to be free.”³³² Hegel claimed further that “the mutually related self-conscious subjects, by setting aside their unequal particular individuality, have risen to the consciousness of their real universality, of the freedom belonging to all, and hence the intuition of their specific identity with each other.”³³³ This kind of relationship is consonant with the interpersonal basis of the ‘independence’ of “universally developed individuals” in Marx’s idea of “a rational state of society” (organized on the basis of the aforementioned principle “From each according to [their] ability, to each according to [their] needs”).³³⁴ “In this state of universal

³³⁰ Marx 1994, 53.

³³¹ Hegel 1971, 171.

³³² Ibid., 176.

³³³ Ibid. Cf. Hegel’s claim that “Spirit is the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself; the being that is the movement of retaining its self-identity in its otherness” (Hegel 1977, 459).

³³⁴ Marx 2010c, 88.

freedom,” Hegel claimed, “in being reflected into myself, I am immediately reflected into the other person, and, conversely, in relating myself to the other I am immediately *self*-related.”³³⁵

The consciously reciprocated “love” that Marx envisioned can be further articulated in accordance with what Aristotle called true “friendship.” It is based on the mutually recognized and reciprocated practice of virtue³³⁶ between “universally developed individuals,” whereby the ‘eudaimonic’ experience of the other is the purpose of the relationship for both individuals.³³⁷ Aristotle claimed that “mutual love involves choice and choice springs from a state of character,” and in relations intimate enough, individuals

“wish well to those whom they love, for their sake, not as a result of feeling but as a result of a state of character. And in loving a friend [individuals] love what is good for themselves; for the good [individual] in becoming a friend becomes a good to [their] friend.”³³⁸

Such individuals are “sharing a single soul,” as Aristotle put it, and are therefore “in a sense the same thing, though in separate individuals.”³³⁹

³³⁵ Hegel 1971, 176-177.

³³⁶ As Vanier put it, “Friendship requires this inner stability in a person, an inner structure or state of character that Aristotle calls virtue. The virtues are intellectual or moral qualities that steer the will, the capacity to judge and engage one’s freedom for another person’s good” (Vanier 2001, 68). Thus it is not sufficiently accurate to claim, as Richard Miller did, that this society “is held together by mutual caring” (Miller 1981, 327).

³³⁷ Cf. Ollman’s claim—which omits the idea of the ‘perfect practice of virtue’—that the “desire to please is not associated with any sense of duty, but with the satisfaction one gets at this time in helping others.... We can approximate what takes place here if we view each person as loving all others such that he or she can get pleasure from the pleasure they derive from his or her efforts.... Marx is universalizing this emotion...to the point where each person is able to feel it for everyone whom his/her actions effect, which in communism is the whole of society.... [People] at this time also engage in communal activities for the sheer pleasure of being with others. Human togetherness has become its own justification” (Ollman 1978, 72-73).

³³⁸ Aristotle 1998, 200-1.

³³⁹ Aristotle 2011, 127; Aristotle 1998, 213. Aristotle thought that “being a friend amounts to being a separate self. Perceiving a friend, then, must be in a manner perceiving oneself, and in a manner knowing oneself” (Aristotle 2011, 138).

Marx's depiction of this intersubjective experience of "mutual and recognized love" in an "advanced phase of communist society" indicates that what he called the "*human need*" for "the *other* person as a person" would become ubiquitous.³⁴⁰ This idea of experiencing each other as a "person" can be articulated in Hegelian terms as the recognition of an individual in their "single existence as possessing universality" and, "therefore, as inherently infinite" (i.e., as "*rational*" and "*free*").³⁴¹ In such relations we would recognize this "infinite" worth of all other human beings as ends-in-themselves and act toward each other in ways that affirm our shared "universal" freedom by practicing "complete virtue." 'Infinity' also manifests for our consciousness in another way because love, as it were, 'increases in amount' when it is shared. As Hegel claimed, love "is a mutual giving and taking.... The lover who takes is not thereby made richer than the other; he is enriched indeed, but only so much as the other is. So too the giver does not make himself poorer; by giving to the other he has at the same time and to the same extent enhanced his own treasure."³⁴² In the words of a poet,

"True Love in this differs from gold and clay,

*That to divide is not to take away."*³⁴³

Ultimately, Marx's vision of the character of social relations in "communist society" is relevant for our understanding of his idea of revolutionary subjectivity because an incipient form of these relations, and thus also the ethical capacities corresponding to it, must develop among revolutionary subjects in capitalism as a conditional necessity for the initiation of the revolutionary transition to "communist society."

³⁴⁰ Aristotle 1998, 195; Marx 1964, 134.

³⁴¹ Hegel 1971, 70.

³⁴² Hegel 1961, 307.

³⁴³ Shelley 1956, 232.

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”*³⁴⁴

3. A Note on “the first phase of communist society”

Marx imagined a period of transition between capitalism and “an advanced phase of communist society.” He described this initial phase of the revolutionary transformation of capitalism as “the first phase of communist society” and he claimed that there is a “corresponding period of transformation in the political sphere and in this period the state can only take the form of a *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”³⁴⁵ It is during this period of the “self-government of the producers” that we initiate the reorganization of social life into conditions in which our “essential powers” can flourish.³⁴⁶ “What the proletariat has to do,” Marx maintained, “is to transform the present capitalist character of...organized labour and [the] centralized means of labour, to transform them from the means of class rule and class exploitation into forms of free associated labour and social means of production.”³⁴⁷

This transitory period is not what Marx described as “*crude communism*” in 1844, i.e., the form it took in the minds of various early ‘utopian’ socialists (e.g. Babouvists), although there are some similarities with his discussion in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*. For example, in 1844 he claimed that

“The community is only a community of *labour*, and equality of *wages* paid out by communal capital—by the *community* as the universal capitalist. Both sides of the

³⁴⁴ Corinthians 13:12.

³⁴⁵ Marx 2010c, 355.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 210.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 256.

relationship are raised to an *imagined* universality—*labour* as the category in which every person is placed, and *capital* as the acknowledged universality and power of the community.”³⁴⁸

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program* he wrote that in this period “everyone is just a worker like everyone else,” i.e., “individuals are regarded *only as workers* and nothing else is seen in them, everything else is ignored.”³⁴⁹ However, as he claimed in *The Civil War in France*, this is qualified by the fact that even in situations when the “Commune does not do away with the class struggles, through which the working classes strive to the abolition of all classes and, therefore, of all [class rule],” it nevertheless “affords the rational medium in which that class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way.”³⁵⁰ The character of the commune is a reflection of the collectivity of individual characters of the people that make it up. On Marx’s premises, “crude communism” is an early manifestation of the “socialist principle” which is maintained by “crude and thoughtless” individuals who have not developed sufficiently in the womb of capitalist society—it is a “still immature communism.”³⁵¹ Premature attempts at social reform or revolution (e.g., Owen’s New Lanark or Soviet Russia) have immature results.

Marx claimed that the “first phase” of “communist society” is still circumscribed by “bourgeois right” and “bourgeois limitation” because it “has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society.”³⁵² It is “inevitable” that this phase is in “every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually...still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society

³⁴⁸ Marx 1964, 134.

³⁴⁹ Marx 2010c, 346-7.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁵¹ Marx 1967, 213; Marx 1964, 135. Consider, for example, Marx’s claim that “crude communism is only the culmination” of “General *envy* constituting itself as a power,” i.e., “the disguise in which *greed* re-establishes itself and satisfies itself” (*Ibid.*, 133).

³⁵² Marx 2010c, 346.

from whose womb it has emerged” because the individuals creating it are raised in capitalist society; however, establishing the conditions for “a new and better society” requires a progressive development of human capacities preceding the revolution nonetheless, as well as amid the presence of these “defects” in the post-revolutionary period.³⁵³ In short, the subjective capacities (including and especially ethical capacities) that are required to *initiate* the revolutionary transition must begin to develop within capitalist society.

4. Philosophical Controversies: the “Universal” Nature of Freedom and the Principle of “Justice” in Marx’s Writings

After what has preceded we are in a better position to take into account two distinct yet interrelated points of philosophical contention and debate regarding Marx’s thought. These are 1) the controversy over the idea of freedom as “universal” in an ‘objective’/intersubjective sense, and 2) the controversy over the idea of a principle of “justice” of the same sort.³⁵⁴ These ideas, of course, are points of contention in themselves outside of any consideration of Marx’s work.

From the perspective of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ our species-life is a movement of transition from animal life in nature to the freedom of an elevated humanity. It thus calls for an attitude toward social theory which involves a perspective contrary to the prevalent assumption that there can be no “universal” experience of freedom. From the perspective of Marx’s social theory, the idea that the meaning of “freedom” is only relative to particular groups or

³⁵³ Ibid., 288.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Hegel’s claim that “the State is the externally existing, genuinely moral life. It is the union of the universal and essential with the subjective will, and as such it is *Morality*. The individual who lives in this unity has a moral life, a value which consists in this substantiality alone. Sophocles’ *Antigone* says: ‘The divine commands are not of yesterday nor of today; no, they have an infinite existence, and no one can say whence they came.’ The laws of ethics are not accidental, but are rationality itself. It is the end of the State to make the substantial prevail and maintain itself in the actual doings of men and in their convictions. It is the absolute interest of Reason that this moral whole exist” (Hegel 1956, 40).

individuals³⁵⁵—and thus that there are only incommensurable *freedoms*—is an expression of “estrangement.” This idea of freedom is closely associated with the misanthropic opinion that there exists an unresolvable antithesis between individual freedom and social existence and that we are, as a result, doomed to speak longingly of a ‘good life’, as though we can imagine it in an ‘ideal world’ but believe it is impossible to experience in any actually conceivable society.

In the philosophical tradition to which Marx belongs, this view of freedom is one-sided and deficient of substance in comparison to the idea that freedom is achieved through the intersubjective unity of the “universal” wills of individuals.³⁵⁶ This is expressed, for example, in Marx’s idea that “universal human emancipation” can only be attained in a society based on “production by freely associated” individuals “under their conscious and planned control.”³⁵⁷ This is a key reason why Marx thought that “personal freedom becomes possible only within the community.”³⁵⁸ Indeed, his writing indicates that in his view this would begin to arise out of necessity in the revolutionary situation:

“With the community of revolutionary proletarians...who take their conditions of existence and those of all members of society under their control...it is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. For it is the association of individuals (assuming

³⁵⁵ Hegel described this as the “atomistic principle” of Liberalism which “insists upon the sway of individual wills,” and he claimed that its ascension in the modern world is the “problem...with which history is now occupied, whose solution it has to work out in the future” (Ibid., 452). The rise of this principle has brought with it what he called the “perpetually recurring misapprehension of Freedom” which “consists in regarding that term only in its *formal*, subjective sense, abstracted from its essential objects and aims” (Ibid., 41).

³⁵⁶ This is what Hegel called the “*rational Will*” (Ibid., 38).

³⁵⁷ Marx 1994, 10; Marx 1976, 173.

³⁵⁸ “Only within the community,” he claimed, “has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions.... In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association” (Marx and Engels 1998, 86-87).

the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development of movement of individuals under their control.”³⁵⁹

In his vision of an emancipated society, our individuality is not lost in a dull, abstract homogeneity of subjectivities; instead, it exists as a vibrant moment in the total “movement of becoming” of distinct individuals developing themselves “universally.”³⁶⁰ On Marx’s premises every human being has the potential to develop the “rational” capacities required to actualize it. If the development of an individual is stunted or they are disabled in some way, they do not thereby cease to be an end-in-themselves and their wellbeing would remain an integral aspect of a “rational” social order nonetheless.³⁶¹

These issues concerning Marx’s idea of freedom overlap with the controversy over the idea of “justice” in his work. In the literature on his thought there is a disagreement about whether “universal” ethical values, like “justice,” exist in his writing. In the last chapter we encountered a prevalent view of Marx’s thought, i.e., that he espoused a kind of socio-historical relativism for the determination of ethical values. In this view, which rests upon a misconception of his ‘Base-Superstructure’ formulation, both the socio-historical conditions of life and the values that arise

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 86.

³⁶⁰ As Avineri claimed, Marx’s idea of communism “is not a collectivism which subsumes the individual under an abstract whole; it is rather an attempt to break down the barriers between the individual and society and to try to find the key to the reunion of these two aspects of human existence” (Avineri 1968, 89). Cf. Hegel’s idea that the “substance of the Spirit is freedom. From this, we can infer that its end in the historical process is the freedom of the subject to follow its own conscience and morality, and to pursue and implement its own universal ends; it also implies that the subject has infinite value and that it must become conscious of its supremacy. The end of the world Spirit is realised in substance through the freedom of each individual” (Hegel 1956, 55).

³⁶¹ According to Marx, in these conditions “that portion of the product” of “labour which goes into the worker’s own individual consumption” is “freed from its capitalist limit and expanded to the scale of consumption that” is “required for the full development of individuality”; “surplus labour and surplus product are also reduced” to “form an insurance and reserve fund,” and “for the constant expansion of reproduction in the degree determined by social need”; and both “the necessary labour” and “the surplus labour are taken to include the amount of labour that those capable of work must always perform for those members of society not yet capable, or no longer capable of working” (Marx 1981, 1015-16).

in these conditions are ultimately transient and fleeting. Sayers, for instance, maintains that “Marxism does not involve a moral approach to history; but rather a historical approach to morality. It cannot and does not appeal to universal moral principles or values; for the essential insight of Marxism is that morality is a social and historical phenomenon.”³⁶² This mistakenly conflates Marx’s anti-moralism with an ethical-relativism rooted in fluctuations of historically determinate forms of social life-activity. Marx espoused a “universal” principle of “justice” but he was not *moralistic*. Indeed, moralism is inconsistent with this in principle. Throughout their lives Marx and Engels maintained the perspective that

“communists do not oppose egoism to selflessness or selflessness to egoism..... The communists do not preach *morality* at all.

They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists, etc.; on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much selflessness, *is* in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals. Hence, the communists by no means want...to do away with the ‘private individual’ for the sake of the ‘general’, selfless man. That is a figment of the imagination.”³⁶³

Thus although Marx’s idea of “justice” is a “universal moral principle,” it is not a ‘categorical ought’ and he is not moralistic because, in his view, our conception of what is “just” or morally

³⁶² Sayers 1998, 116.

³⁶³ Marx and Engels 1998, 265. Cf. Hegel’s claim that “a person is a specific existence; not man in general (a term to which no real existence corresponds)” (Hegel 1956, 24).

“right” and “good” reflects the development of our “moral virtuosity” which coincides with the definite conditions of social life-activity that we are creatures of.³⁶⁴ Hence his claim that

“If correctly understood interest is the principle of all morality, man’s private interest must be made to coincide with the interest of humanity. If man is unfree in the materialistic sense, i.e., is free not through the negative power to avoid this or that, but through the positive power to assert his true individuality, crime must not be punished in the individual, but the anti-social sources of crime must be destroyed, and each man must be given social scope for the vital manifestation of his being. If man is shaped by environment, his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature, he will develop his true nature only in society, and the power of his nature must be measured not by the power of the separate individual but by the power of society.”³⁶⁵

In short, from Marx’s perspective our moral/ethical ideas shift historically in accordance with the movement of our “universal” development. His ‘universal principle of justice’ is therefore valid for individuals who have developed “reason” to the extent required for it. Human “self-realization” entails the development of the ability to actualize ideal social relations, i.e., to freely determine our relations in accordance with the “universal” ethical good that we ‘ratiocinatively’ desire.

An accurate grasp of Marx’s philosophical premises is required to reconcile this paradoxical position of his, i.e., that moral/ethical values are historically specific while

³⁶⁴ “My standpoint,” Marx wrote, “from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them” (Marx 1976, 92).

³⁶⁵ Marx 1975b, 130-131.

simultaneously asserting the existence of a “universal” principle of “justice.”³⁶⁶ An analysis of some statements from Engels can help to further clarify this question. “The idea of equality,” he claimed, “both in its bourgeois and in its proletarian form, is itself a historical product, the creation of which required definite historical conditions which in turn themselves presuppose a long previous historical development. It is therefore anything but an eternal truth.”³⁶⁷ And yet in the same work he also wrote: “Are there...*eternal* truths, final and ultimate truths? Certainly there are.”³⁶⁸ Indeed, the claim that the truth of ethical experience is only subjectively relative, determined within particular socio-historical conditions, and so on, is itself supposedly an “ultimate” and “eternal truth.”³⁶⁹ On the basis of the ontological and anthropological premises of ‘Historical Materialism’ there is no contradiction in Engels’ position. In his criticism of Owen’s New Lanark, for instance, it is evident that Engels shared these premises with Marx: “the relatively favourable conditions in which [Owen] had set them were still far removed from allowing them an all-round and rational development of character and mind, and much less a free life.”³⁷⁰ Thus any kind of claim which maintains that Marx “does not appeal to transcendent standards” but rather to those that are “immanent, historical and relative in character” fails to notice that these two apparently contradictory positions are coherently united in his thinking.³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ This is why Geras, for instance, claims that there is “an inconsistency—or paradox” in Marx’s “attitude to normative questions” (Geras 1984, 84). Cf. Tony Burns who agrees “with Geras that Marx’s pronouncements on justice are contradictory” (Burns 2005, 153).

³⁶⁷ Engels 1934, 121.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁶⁹ Cf. Whitehead’s claim that “the discordance over moral codes witnesses to the fact of moral experience. You cannot quarrel about unknown elements. The basis of every discord is some common experience, discordantly realized” (Whitehead 1929, 86). Cf. also the words of Socrates in Plato’s *Gorgias* dialogue: “if human beings didn’t share common experiences, some sharing one, others sharing another, but one of us had some unique experience not shared by others, it wouldn’t be easy for him to communicate what he experienced to the other. I say this because I realize that you and I are both now actually sharing common experience” (Plato 1997, 826).

³⁷⁰ Engels 1934, 288.

³⁷¹ Sayers 1998, 131. In a more recent work Sayers claims that Marx’s “criticism of capitalism implied in the concept of alienation does not appeal to universal moral standards...it is historical and relative. Overcoming alienation must also be conceived in historical terms, not as the realisation of a timeless, universal moral ideal, but

5. Questioning the Possibility of Knowledge about “Communist Society”

In the literature on Marx’s work it is not uncommon to come across the idea that Marx thought we cannot attain substantial knowledge about the freedom that would be actualized in a social form that has yet to be created. For instance, in his book *Philosophy and Revolution*, Stathis Kouvelakis claims that, for Marx, communism is “a radically open-ended political form that is yet to come” and that in his writings he “consistently avoids...anything resembling a...positive representation” of it.³⁷² While Marx left behind relatively few and fragmentary writings about his vision of “communist society” he described its essential features with clarity and in definite terms nonetheless, especially its social relations, its labour process, and its life-activity in general. Much of its actual details will necessarily be discovered in the course of its creation—after all, one of the results of the experience of the Paris Commune was that “the political form...under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour” was “at last discovered” through the act of bringing it into existence—but he did not think that we cannot know about the fundamental elements of “an advanced phase of communist society” before we bring it into being.³⁷³

There is a world of difference between “writing receipts” for “the cook-shops of the future” and knowing the potentialities of our present circumstances through a “critical analysis of the actual facts.” The “speculative” nature of his “dialectical method” of critique involves

as the dialectical supersession of capitalist conditions achieved in communism” (Sayers 2011, xii-xiii). The mistaken assumption underlying this erroneous interpretation is expressed in Sayers’ claim that “principles of justice are not eternally self-evident or rational; they are historical and relative” (Sayers 1998, 144). As we have seen, Marx explicitly identified an “advanced phase of communist society”—including this society’s ethical values and the relations embodying them—with “reason.” Cf. Wood’s claim that “When Marx and Engels say that people at different times and places have held diverse views about the nature of ‘eternal justice’, they are not espousing relativism; they are rather arguing that there are no ‘eternal’ rational principles or formal criteria of justice, applicable irrespective of time and circumstances” (Wood 2004, 133-134).

³⁷² Kouvelakis 2003, 313-14.

³⁷³ Marx 2010c, 212.

comprehending the work of “reason” in the “actual facts” in order “to find the new world through criticism of the old.”³⁷⁴ Marx did not write about a guaranteed “sexual minimum” like Fourier or plans as precise as the ‘utopian socialists’ who designed such elaborate schemes that at times even included instructions on how to organize the cutlery on the dinner table.³⁷⁵ Marx was not interested in laying out such intricate details or attempting his own social experiment, but he still thought that the fundamental elements of a “free” life and the general character of the social organization that it requires must be understood and consciously desired in order to bring it into being.

Marx wrote about “communist society” because its foundations are allegedly already being created—and not only its ‘material’ foundation. He wrote with conviction about the kind of relationships that he thought would exist in an emancipated society because he maintained that he was able to perceive—amid the flux of phenomena associated with the living movement of the capitalist system³⁷⁶—that the germ of this social ethos was present. He thought he had recognized a tendency for cultures of revolutionary solidarity to arise out of the life-experience of working people and his writing indicates that he thought he had direct experience of the transformative potential of working class life.³⁷⁷ His work suggests that this lured him onward in

³⁷⁴ Marx 1967, 212. Even though Whitehead’s idea of “speculative” thought is somewhat different from the Hegelian version that Marx critically appropriated, his idea that “speculative Reason works” to “submit itself to the authority of facts without loss of its mission to transcend the existing analysis of facts” is instructive in this instance (Whitehead 1929, 85).

³⁷⁵ Hunt 2009, 68.

³⁷⁶ “Cooperative factories,” for example, “provide the proof that the capitalist has become...superfluous as a functionary in production” (Marx 1981, 511).

³⁷⁷ Consider, for example, Marx’s claim that “When communist *artisans* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need—the need for society—and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring together. Company, association, and conversation, which again has society as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies” (Marx 1964, 154-55).

the struggle for proletarian revolution and human emancipation, contributing to what Whitehead termed “noble discontent,” the “value” of which—to follow Whitehead’s reasoning—laid “in the hope” that “never deserted” his “glimpses of perfection.”³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Whitehead 1967, 12. “The factor in human life provocative of a noble discontent is the gradual emergence into prominence of a sense of criticism, founded upon appreciations of beauty, and of intellectual distinction, and of duty” (Ibid., 11).

Chapter Four – History

“To think of time—of all that retrospection.

To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward.

Have you guess’d you yourself would not continue?

Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?

Have you fear’d the future would be nothing to you?

Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing?

If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing.

To think that the sun rose in the east—that men and women were flexible, real, alive—that everything was real and alive,

To think that you and I did not see, feel, think, nor bear our part,

To think that we are now here and bear our part.”

- Walt Whitman³⁷⁹

1. “Reason nevertheless prevails”

From Marx’s perspective, life-activity in an “advanced phase of communist society” is the realization of our “nature” in the sense of what we are when fully developed. His interpretation of the historical record of human life thus involves a teleological idea of our genesis and there is abundant evidence which indicates that he thought there has indeed been progress toward our ‘end’, i.e., toward freedom. “Reason directs the world,” as it were, though the form that this takes in human history in Marx’s work is not some kind of Providence; nor is it merely an

³⁷⁹ Whitman 1975, 449-50.

external “dialectic” of nature, although “Reason” is ‘at work’ in an ontological sense in the development of nature into humanity. This is the grand paradox of Marx’s social theory, i.e., that “Reason” (which according to him “has always existed, but not always in reasonable form”) is at work throughout our development and thus through elements of our irrational activity—in a way that we are not conscious of—which impels the development of rational subjectivity (“self-conscious reason”). Marx critically appropriated this idea primarily from Hegel. In short, the form that “Reason” unavoidably takes in the historical process of human development—which is directly connected to the activity of “the human mind”—is “estrangement.” In Marx’s work this is manifest chiefly in the form of the bourgeois “passions” and the “estranged” labour process of capitalism.

We encounter Marx’s sublation of the ontological idea that “Reason directs the world” (and the “speculative” character of his thought) in the various instances in which he presented “estrangement” in capitalist society as positive because of its developmental consequences. There is a substantial amount of evidence to support this interpretation of Marx’s thought. In 1877 he maintained that *Capital* shows how the capitalist mode of production “has itself created the elements of a new economic order” because its “historical tendency” is to beget “with the inexorability of a law of Nature its own negation” and provide “an unprecedented expansion of the productive forces of social labour and the universal development of every individual producer.”³⁸⁰ Similar claims are found elsewhere: In the third volume of *Capital* he claims that the “development of the productive forces of social labour is capital’s historic mission and justification,” and thus it “unwittingly creates the material conditions for a higher form of

³⁸⁰ Marx 1975c, 293. In this way capitalism has, “despite itself,” been “instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time...and thus to free everyone’s time for their own development” (Marx 1973, 708).

production.”³⁸¹ In the first volume of *Capital* he claims that “the capitalist mode of production is a historically necessary condition for the transformation of the labour process into a social process.”³⁸² Alongside these developments in the material forces of production, capitalist society creates the subjectivity that will carry out the revolution and constitute the agents of the initial phases of the transitory process through which this “new society is springing up.”³⁸³

As Hegel put it, “there is Reason in history.”³⁸⁴ Sufficiently recognizing and correctly interpreting the form that this idea takes in Marx’s thought is especially complicated because of the fact that an adequate grasp of Hegel’s philosophy of history is required in order to avoid misunderstanding. McCarney, for instance, claims that Hegel thought “History” is “rational because reason is present in it as substance and subject. It is plain that a doctrine which presupposes rational subjectivity in this form,” i.e., “reason as an autonomous creative subject,” is “not available to Marx.”³⁸⁵ This statement is only partly true in relation to Marx. For him there is no otherworldly, all-powerful subject or Providence guiding history, but from his perspective “reason” does exist, in a qualified sense, as a subject in history nonetheless; i.e., *we* are ultimately the “rational” subject, although our “reason” is initially only an implicit potential and the development of our species is governed by “universal” laws (which are “reason”) which regulate our developmental life-activity.³⁸⁶ Thus it is not entirely accurate to maintain that “Reason is actual in history in so far as it is embodied in a subject which is the vital force of the

³⁸¹ Marx 1981, 368.

³⁸² Marx 1976, 453.

³⁸³ Marx 2010c, 176. Cf. Marx’s claims about the “great historical mission” of the trade unions and “the class that bear in their hands the regeneration of mankind”: in his view it is only “in present capitalist society” that “the material etc. conditions have finally been created which enable and compel the worker to break this historical curse” (Ibid., 91, 99, 343).

³⁸⁴ Hegel 1971, 277.

³⁸⁵ McCarney 1990, 130.

³⁸⁶ Marx claimed, for example, that “the struggle of class against class” is “the prime mover of all social progress” (Marx 2010, 108).

movement of objective reality” as McCarney did, because the “reason” implicit in the lawful movements of the solar system or the movements of the molecules in our bodies, for example, is not a subjective entity.³⁸⁷ “Reason” is ‘at work’ as the “substance” of things, as a “power” which determines the course of “objective reality” in an ontological sense, but in this instance it is not a subjective being.

Marx did not ascribe our historical genesis to some predestined plan of “Reason” as if it were an all-powerful subject which is separate from humanity, conspiring and arranging things to fulfil its Will, but neither is it simply an ‘impersonal’, mechanical process in the natural world. Marx thought “there is Reason in history” not because it is determining our activity from beyond, no-one knows where, but in the Hegelian sense that “Reason” is immanent in our own subjectivity, although it does not attain a fully rational form until our development is completed. Hegel claimed that “the material in which the Ideal of Reason is wrought out” is “Personality itself—human desires—Subjectivity generally. In human knowledge and volition, as its material element, Reason attains positive existence.”³⁸⁸ For him, therefore, the

“only consistent and worthy method which philosophical investigation can adopt, is to take up History where Rationality begins to manifest itself in the actual conduct of the World's affairs (not where it is merely an undeveloped potentiality),—where a condition of things is present in which it realises itself in consciousness, will and action.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ McCarney 1990, 168.

³⁸⁸ Hegel 1956, 38.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 59.

This view is present in Marx's analysis as well. In his treatment of our development he emphasized the definite character of human activity in capitalism that he thought was "indispensable" for the development of rational subjectivity and the corresponding progressive transformation of our life-world. For example, in an article about the victory of the Union forces in Maryland during the American Civil War on September 17, 1862, he claimed that "Reason nevertheless prevails in world history."³⁹⁰ His writings from this period indicate that he thought wage-labour in capitalism has greater positive consequences for human development than slave labour. The victory of Northern capitalism over the slave mode of production in the South thus represented a historical advance in the process of the development of the "human spirit." He compared the developmental potentials of slavery and "free" wage-workers and claimed that the difference between the "free worker's work" and the work of the slave functions to "fit" the wage-worker "for quite a different historical role."³⁹¹ He thought that North America was where these advantages of wage-labour are "most obviously" present "in stark contrast to" the "nature of *slave labour*."³⁹²

It is evident that Marx thought history had provided evidence for his views. Karl Löwith was therefore mistaken, from Marx's perspective at least, to think that "History" is "meaningful only by indicating some transcendent purpose beyond the actual facts."³⁹³ On the contrary, as Marx claimed, "if we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then

³⁹⁰ Marx 1984, 249.

³⁹¹ Marx 1976, 1033-34.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Löwith 1949, 5. For Löwith, the "claim that history has an ultimate meaning implies a final purpose or goal transcending the actual events," so that to "ask earnestly the question of the ultimate meaning of history takes one's breath away; it transports us into a vacuum which only hope and faith can fulfil" (Ibid., 6, 4).

all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.”³⁹⁴ Thus he attempted to explain how capitalist “*relations* are themselves produced” along “with the material preconditions of their dissolution,” and “that their *historical justification* as a *necessary form* of economic development and of the production of social wealth may be undermined.”³⁹⁵ After all, Marx thought that “scientific” insight into the genesis of “the communist organization of society” entails being able to comprehend it as it “*emerges*” from the “womb” of capitalist society. “A great mind,” Hegel argued, “has great experiences, when it looks into nature or history; it sees what is rational and expresses it.”³⁹⁶

2. The Development of Humanity through “Estrangement” in History

Abundant evidence indicates that the idea of the development of “self-conscious reason” through “estrangement” was an essential feature of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ even though a theory of “the so-called general development of the human mind” is not suitable for the comprehension of “social existence” *apart from* a comprehension of “the material conditions of life.”³⁹⁷ Marx’s ‘materialism’ is entirely consistent with the idea that the human species is developing its cognitive abilities throughout history. He perceived every feature of our socio-historical life-activity as an objectification of the powers of our “mind.”³⁹⁸ Evidence can be drawn from throughout the span of Marx’s post-1845 writings (i.e., the generally accepted time of his ‘materialist turn’) which indicates that an idea of “the general development of the human mind” is a fundamental feature of his ‘Historical Materialism’. However, there exists a relatively

³⁹⁴ Marx 1973, 159.

³⁹⁵ Marx 1976, 1065.

³⁹⁶ Hegel 1991b, 60.

³⁹⁷ Marx 1977, 20-21. According to Engels, with Marx’s work “idealism was driven from this last refuge, the philosophy of history; now a materialist conception of history was propounded, and the way found to explain man’s consciousness by his being, instead of, as heretofore, his being by his consciousness” (Engels 1934, 32).

³⁹⁸ Marx 1976, 284.

widespread misunderstanding of Marx's theoretical rift with German Idealism which has led many Marxists and non-Marxists alike to overlook or deny the essential role of the development of "the human mind" in Marx's view of human history and his overall social theory (aside from revolutionary class-consciousness).

Marx's emphasis on our corporeality is often cited as a basis for denying that the "human mind" plays a fundamental role in his 'Historical Materialism' but in his view the socio-material modes of production which satisfy our needs as corporeal beings are expressions of the degree to which "the human mind" has developed. In short, Marx did not treat the activity of "mind" as an epiphenomenon even though he maintained that this development is also conditioned by developments in our physical constitution and life. "We see how the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry," he claimed, "are the *open* book of [*humanity's*] *essential powers*, the perceptibly existing human *psychology*."³⁹⁹ The development of "mind" is thus a causal influence which determines the development of our 'socio-material' conditions. This is evident, for example, in his claim that "the conquest of the forces of nature by the social intellect is the precondition of the productive power of the means of labour as developed into the automatic process."⁴⁰⁰ Marx always presupposed that this "intellect" was a "precondition" in this way.⁴⁰¹

A peculiar feature of the manifestation of "self-conscious reason" is that it proceeds through "estrangement" which, in a word, is a process whereby humanity's powers, as a collectivity of individual subjects, take on an independent and hostile existence and are

³⁹⁹ Marx 1975, 302. He claimed that "products of human industry" are "*organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified*" (Marx 1973, 706).

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 709.

⁴⁰¹ He spoke, for example, of the "development of the material (and hence also the intellectual) forces of production" (Ibid., 502).

experienced as if they are actually independently animate objects. In capitalism it has reached a fever pitch: it is “a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over [humanity],” an estranged social power which is “independent not only of isolated individuals but even all of them together.”⁴⁰² Since Marx’s death it seems that the process of “estrangement” has become intensified, confirming his claim that “Capital shows itself more and more to be...an alienated social power which has gained an autonomous position and confronts society as a thing, and as the power that the capitalist has through this thing.”⁴⁰³ This is not just a simple hallucination on our part. As Marx claimed, “the worker actually treats the social character of his work, its combination with the work of others for a common goal, as a power that is alien to him; the conditions in which this combination is realized are for him the property of another.”⁴⁰⁴ Marx paints a perplexing picture of our history: the “estrangement” at the basis of our “long and tormented development” is a “necessary” phase in the development of our “universality” and the life-world corresponding to it, including the specific form of “estrangement” experienced in capitalism.⁴⁰⁵ As he maintained, the

“*most extreme form of alienation*, wherein labour appears in the relation of capital and wage labour, and labour, productive activity appears in relation to its own conditions and its own product, is a necessary point of transition—and therefore already contains in *itself*, in a still only inverted form, turned on its head, the

⁴⁰² Marx 1976, 175; Marx and Engels 1998, 263.

⁴⁰³ Marx 1981, 373.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

⁴⁰⁵ He claimed that “so long as man does not recognise himself as man and does not organise the world humanly, this *common life* appears in the form of *alienation*, because its *subject*, man, is a being alienated from itself. Men as actual, living, particular individuals, not in an abstraction, *constitute* this common life. It is, therefore, *what* men are. To say that *man* alienates himself is the same as saying that the *society* of this alienated man is the caricature of his *actual common life*, of his true generic life. His activity, therefore, appears as a torment, his own creation as a force alien to him, his wealth as poverty, the *essential bond* connecting him with other men as something unessential so that the separation from other men appears as his true existence” (Marx 1994, 46).

dissolution of all *limited presuppositions of production*, and moreover creates and produces the unconditional presuppositions of production, and therewith the full material conditions for the total, universal development of the productive forces of the individual.”⁴⁰⁶

These claims are reiterated throughout Marx’s writings. For instance, he claimed that

“capitalist production in its highest development is a necessary point of transition towards the transformation of capital back into the property of individual producers, but rather as their property as associated producers, as directly social property. It is furthermore a point of transition towards the transformation of all functions formerly bound up with capital ownership in the reproduction process into simple functions of the associated producers, into social functions.”⁴⁰⁷

And elsewhere he maintained that

“[At] the level of material production, of the life-process in the realm of the social...we find...the inversion of subject into object and *vice versa*. Viewed *historically* this inversion is the indispensable transition without which wealth as such, i.e. the relentless productive forces of social labour, which alone can form the material base of a free human society, could not possibly be created by force at the expense of the majority. This antagonistic stage cannot be avoided.... What we are confronted by here is the *alienation* of man from his own labour.”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Marx 1973, 515.

⁴⁰⁷ Marx 1981, 568.

⁴⁰⁸ Marx 1976, 990.

Without a grounding in Marx's philosophical premises it is impossible to understand his general claim that "it is only through the most tremendous waste of individual development that the development of humanity in general is secured and pursued" in "that epoch of history that directly precedes the conscious reconstruction of human society."⁴⁰⁹

That Hegel had some influence on Marx's view of history is generally accepted, but the extent of his influence and its precise nature is not properly recognized. Marx's youthful criticism of Hegel took aim at his articulation of the struggle for freedom in terms of "Spirit's" self-estrangement and diremption in nature and the eventual return to itself with consciousness of its own essential freedom. In the process of clarifying his own thoughts he claimed that

"Hegel's view of history presupposes an *abstract* or *Absolute Spirit* which develops in such a way that mankind is only a *Mass*, a conscious or unconscious vehicle for Spirit. Hence Hegel provides for the development of a *speculative*, esoteric history within *empirical* exoteric history. This history of mankind becomes the history of the *abstract spirit* of mankind, thus a spirit *beyond* actual man."⁴¹⁰

However, rather than simply abandoning Hegel's perspective, Marx sublated his idea of the "human spirit." For Marx, like Hegel, the realization of freedom takes place as a result of the development of "the human mind" through a process of "estrangement," and he expressed this in a way that is essentially similar to Hegel's claim that "Reason" attains "positive existence" through the "desires" of individuals. This feature of 'Historical Materialism' is inconspicuously implied in a letter from Engels to Borgius:

⁴⁰⁹ Marx 1981, 182.

⁴¹⁰ Marx 1967, 383. He described "*Hegel's view of history*" as "only the *speculative* expression of the *Christian-Germanic* dogma of the antithesis between *Spirit* and *Matter*, *God* and the *World*" (Ibid.).

“By economic relations, considered by us to be the determinant upon which the history of society is based, we understand the manner in which men of a certain society produce those products among themselves....

While men may make their own history, they have not hitherto done so with a concerted will in accordance with a concerted plan, not even in a given and clearly delimited society. Their aspirations are at variance, which is why all such societies are governed by *necessity* of which the counterpart and manifestation is *chance*. The necessity which here invariably prevails over chance is again ultimately economic.”⁴¹¹

This clash of interests that Engels referred to is the aspect of “estrangement” which manifests as social antagonisms that have progressive consequences. This kind of social antagonism plays a significant role in Kant’s understanding of humanity’s development as well. He called it “unsociable sociability” and his treatment of it is informative for the purpose of interpreting Marx’s view of human history.

Kant was interested in making sense of “the transition from the brutishness of a merely animal creature to humanity, from the leading reins of instinct to the direction of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature into the state of freedom.”⁴¹² He also thought that our capacity for self-creation is a unique characteristic of our species—and yet he claimed that

“nature pursues a regular course...and gradually leads our species from the low level of animal nature to the highest level of humanity by its own art (an art which nature compels humankind to invent) and develops, in this seemingly disorderly

⁴¹¹ Engels 2004, 264-66.

⁴¹² Kant 2006, 29.

arrangement, those original predispositions [of our species] in a fully regular manner.”⁴¹³

In the end he did not think that we could “reasonably hope” for our full development “without presupposing a plan of nature.”⁴¹⁴ This “plan of nature” unfolds through our “tendency to enter into society” which is connected “with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society,” and it is precisely “this resistance that awakens all human powers.”⁴¹⁵ We are “driven by lust for honor, power, or property, to establish a position” for ourselves among each other, and Kant thought that without this “quarrelsomeness,” “jealously competitive vanity” and the “insatiable appetite for property and even for power,” all of “the excellent natural human predispositions would lie in eternal slumber, undeveloped.”⁴¹⁶ According to him this is how “the first true steps are taken from brutishness to culture” and “a foundation is laid for a manner of thinking which is able, over time, to transform the primitive natural predisposition for moral discernment into definite practical principles and, in this way, to ultimately transform into an agreement a society that initially had been *pathologically* coerced into a *moral* whole.”⁴¹⁷ In his *Critique of Judgement* Kant suggests that a class relation between an oppressed labouring group

⁴¹³ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 16. According to Kant, “if we consider the free exercise of the human will *broadly*, we can ultimately discern a regular progression in its appearances. History further lets us hope that, in this way, that which seems confused and irregular when considering particular individuals can nonetheless be recognized as a steadily progressing, albeit slow development of the original capacities of the species” (Ibid., 3).

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. Cf. Kant 2007, 261-2. He maintained that in the process we are “thrust into work and hardship, only to find means, in turn, to cleverly escape the latter” (Kant 2006, 7). Cf. Hegel’s claim that what “is said about labour” in the biblical myth of the Fall is “that it is both the result of the schism”—i.e., “the abandonment of natural unity” which entails a “marvellous inner schism of the spiritual”—“and also its overcoming” (Hegel 1991b, 61-62).

and a group of expropriators is a fundamental form that “unsociable sociability” takes, but in this respect his thinking both converges and differs significantly with Marx’s.⁴¹⁸

Kant was ultimately unable to reconcile our bestial-corporeal element with our inherently rational character. From his perspective, on the one hand, the antagonism between the individual’s self-interest and the moral demands of our social existence will never truly be overcome. On the other hand, a more profound problem is that our ‘empirical-ego’ is situated within what he understood as the mechanical determinism of the physical world which precludes the experience of freedom. We are forced to conclude that the “goal always remains in the distance” as though it is our fate to perpetually strive toward an unattainable destiny.⁴¹⁹ Marx was aware of this problem in Kant’s thought. He claimed that “Kant makes” the “republic” into “the only rational form of state: a postulate of practical reason, which can never be realized but whose achievement must always be the goal striven for and adhered to in one’s beliefs.”⁴²⁰

In his theory of the struggle between “Lord” and “Bondsman,” Hegel incorporated elements of Kant’s “unsocial sociability” but believed that the labourer is positioned for an advance in “self-consciousness.” He focused his attention on the subjective aspect of this “dialectical” socio-productive practice and Marx appropriated this idea in a sublated form; namely, that the historical “self-creation of humanity” is a process of “alienation” and “transcendence of this alienation,” and that labour “is humanity’s *coming-to-be for itself* within *alienation*.”⁴²¹ He agreed with Hegel that labour is a “steeling school” for our self-transformation

⁴¹⁸ Cf. his claim that “the majority, in a mechanical kind of way that calls for no special art, provide the necessities of life for the ease and convenience of others who apply themselves to...science and art. These keep the masses in a state of oppression, with hard work and little enjoyment, though in the course of time much of the culture of the higher classes spreads to them also” (Kant 2007, 261).

⁴¹⁹ Kant 2006, 167.

⁴²⁰ Marx 2010b, 108.

⁴²¹ Marx 1964, 177.

into a free being and that this development is “only possible in the form of estrangement,”⁴²² although in Marx’s view “the severe discipline of capital” acting “on succeeding generations” of working class individuals is the specific form that “estrangement” has taken in the period immediately preceding its overcoming.⁴²³ For instance, he claimed that the “universally developed individuals” of communist society are a product of “history” and that the

“degree and the universality of the development of wealth where *this* individuality becomes possible supposes production on the basis of exchange values as a prior condition, whose universality produces not only the alienation of the individual from himself and from others, but also the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities.”⁴²⁴

From this perspective human development goes hand in hand with the violent “slaughter-bench” of history which is unavoidable because of our “estrangement.”⁴²⁵ This is inherent in Hegel’s idea of the primeval “life and death struggle” between the oppressed labourer and the oppressing exploiter—their “fight for recognition”—which he thought “constitutes a necessary moment in the development of the human spirit.”⁴²⁶

⁴²² Marx maintained that “Hegel grasps man’s self-estrangement, the alienation of man’s essence, man’s loss of objectivity and his loss of realness as self-discovery, change of his nature, objectification and realization. In short...Hegel conceives labour as man’s act of *self-genesis*—conceives man’s relation to himself as an alien being and the manifestation of himself as an alien being to be the emergence of *species consciousness* and *species life*” (Ibid., 187-188).

⁴²³ Marx 1975b, 37; Marx 1964, 177; Marx 1973, 325.

⁴²⁴ Marx 1973, 162.

⁴²⁵ Hegel 1956, 21. Engels commented on the unavoidable necessity of development through estrangement: “For it is a fact that man sprang from the beasts,” he claimed, “and had consequently to use barbaric and almost bestial means to extricate himself from barbarism” (Engels 1934, 203). Cf. Löwith’s claim that the “outstanding element...out of which an interpretation of history could arise at all” is “the basic experience of evil and suffering, and of man’s quest for happiness. The interpretation of history is, in the last analysis, an attempt to understand the meaning of history as the meaning of suffering by historical action” (Löwith 1949, 3).

⁴²⁶ Hegel 1971, 172-3. Cf. Engels’ claim that for Hegel “the history of mankind no longer appeared as a confused whirl of senseless deeds of violence” but “as the process of development of humanity itself” (Engels 1934, 30).

Hegel's influence on Marx's approach to the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat notwithstanding, there is a difference which has important implications for the problem of revolutionary subjectivity that will be explored in the next chapter. Hegel claimed that "the fight for recognition pushed to the extreme...can only occur in the natural state, where men exist only as...separate individuals; but it is absent in civil society and the State because here the recognition for which the combatants fought already exists."⁴²⁷ He even claimed that though "the State may originate in violence, it does not rest on it."⁴²⁸ For Marx, on the contrary, violence is perpetually present to a varying degree within the State and it takes many more or less overt forms within the conditions of bourgeois "civil society." This undercurrent of violence is still evident, for instance, in the social process of production. He wrote that the "*alienation* of the worker in [their] product means" that "the life which [they have] conferred on the object confronts [them] as something hostile and alien," and "if the product" of labour is "an *alien, hostile, powerful* object independent of" the worker, it necessarily follows that "someone else is master of this object, someone who is alien, hostile, powerful, and independent" of them.⁴²⁹ Wage-labour is thus "an activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion, and the yoke of another man."⁴³⁰ From the perspective of humanity as a whole this "estrangement" in capitalism has the peculiar feature that the product of our labour—capital—becomes a power unto itself. According to Marx, it was shown in *Capital* "how not

⁴²⁷Hegel 1971, 172.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. Cf. the following argument in Freud's response to a letter from Einstein in which he asked Freud whether there is "any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war" (Einstein also claimed that "law and might inevitably go hand in hand"): "You begin with the relation between Right and Might. There can be no doubt that that is the correct starting-point for our investigation. But may I replace the word 'might' by the balder and harsher word 'violence'? Today right and violence appear to us as antitheses. It can easily be shown, however, that the one has developed out of the other; and, if we go back to the earliest beginnings and see how that first came about, the problem is easily solved" (Freud, n.d.).

⁴²⁹ Marx 1964, 116.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

merely at the level of ideas, but also in reality, the social character of...labour confronts the worker as something not merely alien, but hostile and antagonistic, when it appears before him objectified and personified in capital.”⁴³¹ The “natural state” is thus still present, though in a canalized form, in the aggressive “avarice” that drives the oppressive exploitation, competition and possessive individualism of capitalism.⁴³²

3. The “Passions” of Capitalists and their “World-Historical” Activity

Marx essentially agreed with Hegel that “estrangement” is a necessary phase in the process whereby “reason” attains “positive existence” and that it works through the “desires” of individuals. In Marx’s thought the “passions” of the class of capitalists who are “only capital personified,” whose “soul is the soul of capital,” plays an analogous role to the Hegelian “passions.”⁴³³ Marx argued that the capitalist is “capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will,” whose “subjective purpose” and “sole driving force” is “the appropriation of ever more wealth in the abstract” via “the valorization of value,” i.e. “the unceasing movement of profitmaking,” the “boundless drive for enrichment” and “passionate chase after value.”⁴³⁴ His work indicates that he critically appropriated the Hegelian idea of the “passions” of “world-historical individuals” that are instrumental in creating the conditions for human emancipation without being conscious of it or intending to.⁴³⁵ There are various instances in his writing in which human actors are depicted as acting in ways that unintentionally

⁴³¹ Marx 1976, 1024-5.

⁴³² Marx 1981, 182.

⁴³³ Marx 1976, 928, 342.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 254. He associates this with “*auri sacra fames*,” i.e., the ‘accursed hunger for gold’ (ibid.).

⁴³⁵ He depicts these “passions” as a driving force of the brutality and suffering that characterizes the “slaughter-bench” of the history of the capitalist mode of production. For instance, in the third volume of *Capital* he claimed that “the filthy avarice of the coal-owners” led to “human sacrifices” (Marx 1981, 182).

accomplish “deeds shared in by the community at large” (as Hegel put it).⁴³⁶ For instance, Marx claimed in *Capital* that

“Except as capital personified, the capitalist has no historical value, and no right to historical existence.... It is only to this extent that the necessity of the capitalist’s own transitory existence is implied in the transitory necessity of the capitalist mode of production. But, in so far as he is capital personified, his motivating force is...the acquisition and augmentation of exchange-values. He is fanatically intent on the valorization of value; consequently he ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production’s sake. In this way he spurs on the development of society’s productive forces, and the creation of those material conditions of production which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.”⁴³⁷

Marx identified the capitalists’ avarice as the incessant urge which drives them to transform the production process. Capital wants to accumulate and the capitalist needs surplus-value, and the consequences are world-historical. As Marx claimed in *Capital*,

“Accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production: this was the formula in which classical economics expressed the historical mission of the bourgeoisie in the period of its domination. Not for one instant did it deceive itself over the nature of wealth’s birth-pangs. But what use is it to lament a historical necessity?”⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Hegel 1956, 24.

⁴³⁷ Marx 1976, 739.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 742.

Marx did not launch a moral critique of bourgeois “passions,” although this did not stop him from describing their horrendousness—while simultaneously recognizing their allegedly progressive consequences. We encounter this view of his, for example, in one of his articles on India:

“England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny⁴³⁹ without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.”⁴⁴⁰

He was clear about his view that the bourgeois “passions” are repulsive,⁴⁴¹ and yet as “passions” in the Hegelian sense they are an unavoidable phase in the process of humanity’s maturation into a free being. Thus Marx claimed that “England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating.”⁴⁴² His description of the consequences of English imperialism and the pursuit of the capitalist “passions” in India also indicates that an essential feature of the ‘historical dialectic’ is the transformation of human subjectivity:

“All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only

⁴³⁹ Elsewhere Marx equated “*destiny*” with “inner law” and “tendency” (Ibid., 976).

⁴⁴⁰ Marx 2010b, 306-7. Cf. Avineri’s claim that “Marx’s ultimate judgment on British rule in India is far removed from a purely moralistic and anti-imperialistic attitude. A strong Hegelian undercurrent of the ‘cunning of reason’ can be traced in Marx’s account” (Avineri 1968, 170).

⁴⁴¹ For instance: “There cannot...remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindustan had to suffer before” (Marx 2010b, 302). More generally, he thought that the “profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked” (Ibid., 324).

⁴⁴² Ibid.

on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both. Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected progress without dragging individuals and peoples through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?”⁴⁴³

Marx’s treatment of the capitalist “passions” in the Hegelian sense is explicit in the many instances in which he depicts the “bourgeois mode of production” as “the last antagonistic form of the social process of production” (because, according to him, “the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism”).⁴⁴⁴ Capitalism has exhibited the most marked tendency to revolutionize the productive process⁴⁴⁵ in order to increase efficiency as a consequence of the constant drive of the capitalists’ to increase surplus-value extraction and perpetually accumulate profits.⁴⁴⁶ According

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 323. Cf. the following passage from a *New York Times* article about women from rural communities becoming factory workers in cities in contemporary India: “Much of what they learned in the village must be unlearned here. One evening when Baby begins preparing dinner, several of her roommates protest. She is menstruating, and caste tradition dictates that menstruating women must live in isolation, sleeping alone and taking care not to step into the kitchen, lest they contaminate the food and water. So two of the younger roommates cook, emerging an hour later with a glutinous, inedible glop. At this point, Baby is irritated. Menstruating women are allowed to work in the factory, aren’t they? She walks into the kitchen, and the scent of spices and onions fills the room. After a brief discussion, they agree that the menstruation rules will be void for as long as they are living in Bangalore. Then they stuff themselves with food and fall into a deep sleep. When they are introduced to a factory supervisor and dive to touch her feet, a traditional gesture of respect toward elders, the supervisor jumps back as if she has been stuck with a hot poker. She then assumes a slight crouch, as if preparing to defend herself from further reverence. Back in their bedrooms, the girls laugh hysterically at this. From childhood, they have been told that it is disrespectful for a girl to laugh out loud in the presence of elders. In the event of irrepressible laughter, girls must cover their mouths with anything at hand: the corner of a dupatta, a hand, a washcloth. This lesson, too, flies out the window. In the hostel they laugh like tractors. They laugh so loud they spit their water out” (Barry 2016).

⁴⁴⁴ Marx 1977, 21-22.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. Marx 1976, 647.

⁴⁴⁶ “The driving motive and determining purpose of capitalist production,” Marx claimed, “is the self-valorization of capital to the greatest possible extent, i.e. the greatest possible production of surplus-value, hence the greatest possible exploitation of labour-power by the capitalist” (Ibid., 449). Engels claimed that political economy became a “science” with the “discovery” of surplus-value.

to Marx, capitalism “strives consistently towards the infinite increase of the productive forces of social labour and calls them into being” because of “the infinite urge to wealth.”⁴⁴⁷ Thus for him this so-called ‘inner logic’ of capitalism is animated by the ‘inner drives’ of individuals (which are nevertheless shaped through the activity of the socio-historical process); in other words, this ‘logic’ has a fundamentally subjective component, hence his inclination to link money with human *psychology* and not only depict it solely as an element of socio-productive practice (in its function as a repository of exchange value, for instance). Statements about “Monetary greed” or “mania for wealth,” terms like “*auri sacra fames*” and “profit-mania,” etc., indicate that he thought of money as an expression of the “inner world” of “the human mind,” i.e., the “perceptibly existing human psychology.”⁴⁴⁸

Ultimately there is substantial textual evidence which indicates that Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ has sublated the Hegelian idea that “Reason” is ‘at work’ in human history. Marx chose to emphasize how it is at work through forms of subjective volition that are socially and historically determined in part by “economic necessity.”⁴⁴⁹ In this connection Marx attributed the world-historical activity of capitalism to the “concept” of capital. He claimed that capital is

“the condition of the development of the forces of production as long as they require an external spur, which appears at the same time as their bridle. It is a discipline over

⁴⁴⁷ Marx 1973, 141.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., 222; Marx 1981, 179.

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. his claim about the mercantilist monetary system characteristic of capitalism in its infancy: “The period which precedes the development of modern industrial society opens with general greed for money on the part of individuals as well as of states. The real development of the sources of wealth takes place as it were behind their backs, as a means of gaining possession of the representatives of wealth” (Marx 1973, 225). Marx’s idea that money has “a really magical significance behind the backs of individuals”—whereby it acts as “an enormous instrument in the real development of the forces of social production”—also plays a role in his idea of the development of revolutionary subjectivity (Ibid.). The productive capacities of the working class are an integral form of “the forces of social production” that must develop to initiate the creation of “communist society.” His claim that greed for money on the part of the working class is “a driving-wheel for the development of all forces of production, material and mental,” will be returned to in the next chapter (Ibid., 223).

them, which becomes superfluous and burdensome at a certain level of their development.... These inherent limits have to coincide with the nature of capital, with the essential character of its very concept.”⁴⁵⁰

This evokes Hegel’s idea of the “higher dialectic of the concept.” Recall that for Hegel it “is only by” the “the Will, the activity of man in the widest sense,” that the “Idea as well as abstract characteristics generally” are “realized, actualized; for of themselves they are powerless. The motive power that puts them in operation, and gives them determinate existence, is the need, instinct, inclination, and passion of man.”⁴⁵¹ Capital’s “concept” is “actualized” by the capitalists possessed by their “passions.”

4. The World Market of Global Capitalism and the Establishment of Worldwide Networks of Social Intercourse

A fundamental reason why Marx thought capitalism is “world-historical” is because it is a totalizing system that spreads like wild-fire across the globe “through the inner necessity of this mode of production and its need for an ever extended market.”⁴⁵² Indeed, he thought that the “tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capital itself.”⁴⁵³ From his perspective the “creation of the world market” and “the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market” is an integral part of “the historic task of the capitalist mode of production” which is an unavoidable phase in our development because it contributes to the creation of the “material foundations for the new form of production” and the subjectivity required to initiate

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 415.

⁴⁵¹ Hegel 1956, 22.

⁴⁵² Marx and Engels 1998, 59; Marx 1981, 344.

⁴⁵³ Marx 1973, 408.

it.⁴⁵⁴ He thought that the development of the world market establishes forms of globalized “universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse.”⁴⁵⁵ In particular, he thought that the activity of “world-historical” capitalism creates conditions that facilitate the development of “real connections” which enable individuals and entire societies to overcome forms of isolation that inhibit the development of “intellectual wealth.”⁴⁵⁶

Marx analysed social conditions lacking such connections in French, German, Indian, and Russian communities, among others, and he drew a connection between the prevalence of prejudice rooted in isolated social units—“home-bred conditions surrounded by superstition”—to the “real intellectual wealth of the individual” which “depends entirely on the wealth of [their] real connections.”⁴⁵⁷ This was significant for Marx particularly because, on his assumptions, the growth of these connections are indispensable for the subjective development required for carrying out a successful revolutionary movement. This is one of the main reasons he considered proletarian conditions more favourable for revolutionary development than peasant conditions. As Engels claimed, “the peasants” are “always the bearers of national and local narrow-mindedness.”⁴⁵⁸ It is evident that Marx agreed with this assessment. “What separates the peasant from the proletarian,” he claimed, is not their “real interest” but their “delusive prejudice.”⁴⁵⁹

Marx also linked the lack of “real connections” to populations that give rise to despotic state forms. “Bonaparte,” for example, represented “a class,” i.e., “the *small peasant*

⁴⁵⁴ Marx 1981, 572; Marx 1976, 929. Cf. Marx 1981, 359; Marx 1973, 161; Marx and Engels 1998, 59.

⁴⁵⁵ Marx 2010b, 325.

⁴⁵⁶ Marx and Engels 1998, 59. Cf. Marx 2010, 71.

⁴⁵⁷ Marx and Engels 1998, 57, 59.

⁴⁵⁸ Marx 2010, 215.

⁴⁵⁹ Marx 2010c, 257.

proprietors.”⁴⁶⁰ Marx’s claim that it was “the material conditions which made the feudal French peasant a small proprietor and Napoleon an emperor” follows from the idea that the conditions of the peasantry were not consistent with the development of “intellectual wealth”:

“Their mode of operation isolates them instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. This isolation is strengthened by the wretched state of France’s means of communication and by the poverty of the peasants. Their place of operation, the smallholding, permits no division of labour in its cultivation, no application of science and therefore no diversity of development, variety of talent, or wealth of social relationships.”⁴⁶¹

He had a similar opinion of the “idyllic village communities” in India which, according to him, “had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism”⁴⁶² because “they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies.”⁴⁶³ A principal reason why Marx thought English imperialism would play a partly progressive role in India was because it would establish “real connections”:

“The village isolation produced the absence of roads in India, and the absence of roads perpetuated the village isolation. On this plan a community existed with a given scale of low conveniences, almost without intercourse with other villages, without the desires and efforts indispensable for social advance. The British having

⁴⁶⁰ Marx 2010b, 238.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 241, 238-239.

⁴⁶² Even if there are certain geographical conditions and forms of state which Marx associated with so-called ‘Oriental’ despotism, it is evident that he nevertheless thought that despotism in the ‘Orient’ has essentially the same subjective basis as in the ‘Occident’.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 306.

broken up this self-sufficient *inertia* of the villages, railways will provide the new want of communication and intercourse.”⁴⁶⁴

This, however, did not stop Marx from recognizing that “the history of English economic management in India” was “a history of futile and actually stupid (in practice, infamous) economic experiments.”⁴⁶⁵

In Marx’s view, capitalism has a tendency to play a progressive role by transforming rural communities and agricultural production in a way that is necessary for “the full development of the human race.”⁴⁶⁶ As he claimed,

“capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.”⁴⁶⁷

This indicates further that this process involves a transformation of human subjectivity and that the development of “the human mind” is a fundamental feature of his ‘Historical Materialism’:

“In the sphere of agriculture, large-scale industry has a more revolutionary effect than elsewhere, for the reason that it annihilates the bulwark of the old society, the

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 322.

⁴⁶⁵ Marx 1981, 451.

⁴⁶⁶ Marx 1976, 638.

⁴⁶⁷ Marx 1973, 410.

peasant, and substitutes for him the wage-labourer.... A conscious, technological application of science replaces the previous highly irrational and slothfully traditional way of working.”⁴⁶⁸

As things have come to pass it appears that Marx was not entirely correct about capitalism’s ability to establish “real connections” through the proliferation of markets and other networks of social intercourse worldwide. Of course, he could not have imagined the development of the internet and social media, but as things stand there is evidence which suggests that these technological advances do not necessarily provide people with “real connections.” Rather than hurling us into a new age of Enlightenment, the expansion of the internet has served to demonstrate how even with the opportunity to learn about any topic and connect to different people and cultures almost anywhere in the world, a significant amount of people tend to search for confirmation of their beliefs and narrowly focus their learning on strengthening those existing beliefs while restricting their social intercourse to others like themselves. Indeed, it has never been easier for ignorant individuals to find confirmation of their attitudes and beliefs by connecting with more people that are like themselves. The resulting creation of digital, mass echo-chambers which operate parallel to each other is also observable. Nevertheless, it is true that “real connections” have developed in the sense that we have created the technological means to connect to each other with far reaching, immediate, mass communication and transportation. The innovations in the internet and social media (and all related technologies) in the last decades of the 20th century have greatly expanded our horizon and it has already been demonstrated that these technologies have the potential to profoundly

⁴⁶⁸ Marx 1976, 637.

influence social movements—but it must be emphasized that their efficacy depends on the way we use them, i.e., on our ability to command not only the technology but ourselves as well.

Marx's emphasis on "real connections" should therefore be re-evaluated because while it is evident that capitalism establishes networks of communication,—e.g., by laying the material foundation for mass communication and developing social media (advancing and proliferating technologies and infrastructure for it, spreading it around the globe, etc.)—Marx's idea of what qualifies these connections as "real" presupposes the development of a subject that is sufficiently able to derive "intellectual wealth" from them.⁴⁶⁹ In Kant's elaboration of his idea of the "*sensus communis*" he articulated a kind of mental capacity which is comparable to the one presupposed by Marx's idea of "real connections."⁴⁷⁰ Kant associated it with three maxims: "(1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; (3) always to think consistently. The first is the maxim of *unprejudiced* thought, the second that of *broadened* thought, the third that of *consistent* thought."⁴⁷¹ Kant claimed that the "reason" of subjects such as those that Marx understood as deeply superstitious is "*passive*," and that to "be given to such passivity, consequently to heteronomy of reason, is called *prejudice*;" and for him, the greatest of all prejudices is that of fancying nature not to be subject to rules which the understanding by virtue of its own essential law lays at its basis, i.e., *superstition*." Kant's claims about this matter are

⁴⁶⁹ Consider, for instance, the article "How WhatsApp Destroyed A Village" (Dixit and Mac 2018) which covers a spate of murders in India that are linked to the prevalence of WhatsApp, smartphones, and the spread of 'fake news' among village residents in rural India.

⁴⁷⁰ "[By] the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of a *public* sense, i.e. a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, *as it were*, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective, an illusion that would exert a prejudicial influence upon its judgement. This is accomplished by weighing the judgement, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgements of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else, as the result of a mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own judging" (Kant 2007, 123).

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

also consistent with Marx's view of the subjectivity of individuals who provide a foundation in the population for—and who live under the yoke of—the despotic regimes which arise in conditions lacking “real connections.” According to Kant “the condition of blindness into which superstition places us, and which it even demands from us as an obligation, makes the need of being led by others, and consequently the passive state of the reason, all too evident.”⁴⁷²

Marx ultimately thought that only a “communist” revolution “will liberate separate individuals from the various national and local barriers, bring them into practical connection with the production (including intellectual production) of the whole world and make it possible for them to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man).”⁴⁷³ With the continued growth of the world market he believed this revolution was steadily approaching. He thought that with the growth of the world market “all contradictions come into play” and that these “contradictions” lead to crises which he described as “the urge which drives toward the adoption of a new historic form.”⁴⁷⁴ However, Marx also emphasized the development of the subjectivity required to carry out a revolution when the crises of the world market surface. The intensification of the “contradiction” between the forces and relations of production, for example, will only lead to a revolution if the subjectivity required for it has already matured or matures simultaneously. To put it another way, global economic crises have a marked tendency to spark mass movements, but Marx's work suggests that they alone are not enough to bring about the kind of revolution that he imagined.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Marx and Engels 1998, 59.

⁴⁷⁴ Marx 1973, 227-28.

5. Marx's 'Teleological' Theory of Humanity's Historical Development

Marx's writing indicates that he thought of human development teleologically, i.e., in his view our *telos* is the development of our implicit potential for "universality" and, ultimately, freedom.⁴⁷⁵ The idea that Marx's writing contains a teleological theory is controversial. In the literature on this it is often the case that 'teleology' is associated with ideas that do not reflect the kind of teleology found in Marx's thought and the absence of those ideas in Marx's writings are taken to mean an absence of teleology. Assuming that a teleological development entails an inevitable result⁴⁷⁶ is a common example of something that is correctly not attributed to Marx but incorrectly considered a necessary element of any teleological theory.⁴⁷⁷ To begin with, while there is indeed ample evidence to support the interpretive thesis that Marx's 'Historical Materialism' contains a philosophy of "universal" or "world" history, he was not 'stagist' in the simple mechanical way that is frequently attributed to him, i.e., the perspective of history as a

⁴⁷⁵ Marx's concept of *telos* is consistent with his Aristotelian idea of "nature." According to Meikle it is the "form, state or condition toward which an entity develops by its nature," i.e., "the final form attained in an entity's process of development" (Meikle 1985, 179).

⁴⁷⁶ We see this with Kant, for example. He claimed that "*All of a creature's natural predispositions are destined eventually to develop fully and in accordance with their purpose*" (Kant 2006, 4). Marx did not think of humanity's freedom as our 'destiny' in the sense of an inevitable occurrence (and Kant wound up maintaining contradictory propositions on this matter). Nevertheless it is arguable that Marx would agree with the essence of Kant's claim that "if we abandon" the "teleological theory of nature" we "can no longer understand nature as governed by laws, but rather only as playing aimlessly; and the dismal reign of chance thus replaces the guiding principle of reason" (Ibid., 5).

⁴⁷⁷ For example, Mehmet Tabak claims that "Marx does not assume an inevitable historical development on the basis of an eternal, extraneous, pre-given plan," and the idea that Marx had a "teleological view of history assumes that all societies would undergo the same transition toward the same predetermined goal" (Tabak 2012, 39, 49). Cf. Bensaïd's claim that "Present and future history is not the goal of past history.... Marx had no mania for posteriority. He did not march to the beat of ultimate promises and last judgements" (Bensaïd 2002, 15). Ollman also makes this mistake and claims that Marx's propensity for 'reading history backward' "does not mean that Marx accepts a cause at the end of history, a 'motor force' operating in reverse, a teleology"; and yet Ollman indirectly supports the notion of teleology because he believes that "the unfolding of a potential has a privileged status in Marx's studies," because this is an essential component of the idea of teleological development in Marx's thought (Ollman 2003, 118, 121-2). As Meikle claimed, "the form of teleology that [Marx] uses, in common with Aristotle, is not an occultism in which the future acts causally upon the present.... It is a theoretical correlate of recognising the fact that whole entities of their nature have potentials and lines of development, and in their development, in fully coming-to-be, those entities are simply realising the potentials constituted in their natures" (Meikle 1985, 11).

simply inevitable linear succession of modes of ‘material’ production; but he did not maintain that the course of history is simply contingent on random human activity. The teleological theory inherent in Marx’s writing on human life and history contains these two theoretical positions sublated within it. While his pronouncements may seem paradoxical because of this, he was able to maintain a coherent view of the historical process of human development nonetheless.

In the literature on Marx’s work there is a persistent tendency to associate the idea of “a mechanical sequence of modes of production” and “some transhistorical drive which inevitably leads one social form to be succeeded by a more productive one” with teleology, as Ellen Wood did in a discussion of the “essence of historical materialism and its general theory of history.”⁴⁷⁸ While it is indeed arguable that Marx’s work does not contain an idea of a simple linear process of inevitably successive developments, she mistakenly assumed that this therefore means there is no conception of teleology in his work.⁴⁷⁹ She argues that Marx

“has replaced teleology with history—not history as mere contingency, nor history as a mechanical succession of predetermined stages or a sequence of static structures, but history as a process with its own causalities, constituted by human agency in a

⁴⁷⁸ Wood 2008, 88. Parash Chattopadhyay claimed that “As for the accusation that Marx viewed social development in a teleological way that is as serving a (predetermined) purpose or design, then Marx’s conception of history is certainly not teleological” (Chattopadhyay 2006, 70). He argues that there was an “anti-teleological rein” in the manner “that communism is presented by Marx and Engels in their very first works on the materialist conception of history as a ‘movement’, not a ‘doctrine’” (Ibid, 71). In a similar vein Sayers claims that the idea of “progress” in Marx’s thought “cannot be understood in teleological terms” because it “is not a matter of approaching ever closer to some predetermined end point or ideal,” and he goes so far as to say that “the very notion of a final human end must be rejected” (Sayers 1998, 163).

⁴⁷⁹ She also associated teleology with a “universal technological determinism” (Wood 2008, 91).

context of social relations and social practices which impose their own demands on those engaged in them.”⁴⁸⁰

A grasp of Marx’s ontological and anthropological premises is required to adequately understand the relationship between his idea of our agency and of the socio-historical determinations of individual life because the specific determinations of each historical period circumscribe human agency and, in a sense, determine it, even though Marx did not dissolve human agency into an all-subsuming, mechanically fatalistic movement of ‘History’.

From Marx’s perspective there is not simply one human history even though there is essentially one humanity. There is history anywhere humans live; it depends on the relatedness of individuals as essentially “rational” and “social” beings and it is conditioned by the determinate circumstances in each instance, including the intersection of natural and socio-cultural factors. Civilizations can rise and fall completely unknown to each other and distinct histories of different peoples can entwine and fuse because of our “universal” nature, whereby we become part of other histories and they become partly our own. Thus while Marx had an idea of “universal”/“world” history, he thought that “World history has not always existed” and that “history as world history” is itself “a result” of a specific set of historical trajectories.⁴⁸¹ This kind of “universal” history, which is bound by necessity rooted in our “universal” development, underlies Marx’s infamous claim that in “broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society.”⁴⁸² We must emphasize “broad outline” because in Marx’s view history

⁴⁸⁰ Wood 2008, 90. She claims further that by “insisting on the specificity of capitalism, by refusing to read its principles of motion back into history, and by explaining how every mode of production is governed by its own specific rules for reproduction, Marx is offering precisely the antithesis of teleology” (Ibid., 90).

⁴⁸¹ Marx 1973, 109.

⁴⁸² Marx 1977, 21.

does not proceed in a straight line of inevitably successive stages, but there are nevertheless necessary ‘stages’ in our development into free beings. These ‘stages’ therefore correspond to *our* development which will necessarily involve various particular co-determining characteristics, and this process can be disrupted.⁴⁸³

To borrow a phrase from Bensaïd, there is no “mechanical fatality” in Marx’s theory of history, but there is necessity involved in the determination of its pattern nonetheless.⁴⁸⁴ Our activity is determined by the degree of our “universal” development as individuals and as a species and our history is bound by necessity rooted in this development. Marx thought that it proceeds in part like a ‘natural process’ that is determined by ‘universal laws’. To begin with, at any given moment in our species’ existence, those of us that exist have come from those that preceded us; we are in part determined by these conditions which correspond to our species’ development—a development which has ‘natural’ phases of growth. From Marx’s perspective “communist society” cannot emerge from merely any social form. The necessity in this instance is *conditional* necessity. Consider, for example, Marx’s claim that

“In general, the development of the industrial proletariat is conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. Only under the rule of the bourgeoisie does it begin to exist on a broad national basis, which elevates its revolution to a

⁴⁸³ This of course has direct implications for the ‘multi-linearity’ debate among Marxists. This debate concerns the question about whether or not all nations and peoples who have not experienced capitalism necessarily need to move through it in order to create “communism.” Kevin Anderson poses the question thus: “Was the pathway through which modern capitalism had emerged in Western Europe and North America to be followed by all other societies, with the rest of the world simply left behind by these technologically more advanced societies?” (Anderson 2010, 172). Marx’s work suggests that the answer to this question of multi-linear paths to “communism” is both yes *and* no. A pre-capitalist nation can embark on a path to create “communism” in which they do not first pass through capitalism, but only insofar as those who must appropriate the “universality” of the productive forces and other technological and scientific advances created by capitalism are in conditions that have allowed them to develop the capacity to do so. This also includes the level of cultural development required for the relations appropriate to “communist society.”

⁴⁸⁴ Bensaïd 2002, 56.

national one; only under the rule of the bourgeoisie which serves to tear up the material roots of feudal society and level the ground, thus creating the only possible conditions for a proletarian revolution.”⁴⁸⁵

From his perspective the development of our “universality” as a species, i.e., the basis of our agency, has taken place through the activity of individuals who are not determined by themselves entirely. Indeed, we were initially a result of “*natural history*” (i.e., we emerged from nature as creatures of the natural world) and for Marx “History itself is a *real* part of *natural history*—of nature developing into [humanity].”⁴⁸⁶ Evidence suggests that we have originated in the womb of the cosmos, out of lower forms of animals, plants, simple cellular organisms and even seemingly ‘dead, inorganic matter’. Thus we must admit that a process has taken place, and is perhaps still taking place, from which our potential for agency—i.e., our “universal” capacities—emerged in the course of “*natural history*.”

Marx attempted to account for what he conceived as a discernable tendency upward not only in the evolutionary process of the natural world but human history as well—a trend which in the broad scheme of human activity has taken place *unintentionally*. The record of history shows groups and individuals motivated by particular interests and yet at certain moments our activity has had unintended results that changed the course of human history in ways which have, according Marx, proved necessary for the realization of freedom. In his view of history the course of our species’ “universal” development has proceeded for the most part unknown to us and in so far as this development results from activities of ours that are oriented toward some other end it can be described as a process that we participate in unconsciously. For example,

⁴⁸⁵ Marx 2010b, 46.

⁴⁸⁶ Marx 1964, 143.

Marx thought the British bourgeoisie were the “unconscious tool of history.”⁴⁸⁷ Our activity as individuals taken collectively makes history, but as individuals we are also made by history, i.e., by the activity of those who came before us, including those who still exist contemporaneously with us. Marx claimed, for instance, that in “the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production.”⁴⁸⁸

In short, on Marx’s premises our agency is dependent on our “universal” development through the life-movement of our species which is governed by “universal” laws. Ultimately, our life-process has ‘transhistorical’ characteristics, i.e., characteristics involved in all specific historical periods and modes of production, which reassert themselves in a different way in each particular form of society in sync with our “universal” development and the circumstances which correspond to it. Thus each characteristic of ours which is common to all periods has the potential to transform during, and in accordance with, our species’ ‘natural life-process’ of growth. The labour process, for example, is a fundamental feature of human life-activity which pulsates throughout all distinct modes of production and forms of society.⁴⁸⁹ In any given period

⁴⁸⁷ Marx 2010b, 307.

⁴⁸⁸ Marx 1977, 20. The emphasis that Marx places on our corporeality, which is a key element of the ‘materialism’ of his ‘Historical Materialism’, has profound implications for our conception of our agency. Consider, for example, Whitehead’s claim that individuals “are driven by their thoughts as well as by the molecules in their bodies, by intelligence and by senseless forces.... Our consciousness does not initiate our modes of functioning. We awake to find ourselves engaged in process, immersed in satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and actively modifying, either by intensification, or by attenuation, or by the introduction of novel purposes” (Whitehead 1967, 46).

⁴⁸⁹ On this matter it is worth quoting Marx at length: “In so far as the labour process is a simple process between man and nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of its development. But each particular historical form of this process further develops the material foundations and social forms. Once a certain level of maturity is attained, the particular historical form is shed and makes way for a higher form. The sign that the moment of such a crisis has arrived is that the contradiction and antithesis between, on the one hand, the relations of distribution, hence also the specific historical form of relations of production corresponding to them, and, on the other hand, the productive forces, productivity, and the development of its agents, gains in breadth

we have developed our “universal” capacities to some degree through activity which is partly self-determined and partly the result of broader interrelated processes inherent in the natural and socio-historical elements of our mode of life. Thus in his view “when a society has begun to track down the natural laws of its movement” we “can neither leap over the natural phases of its development nor remove them by decree,” although we can “shorten and lessen the birth-pangs” by understanding it.⁴⁹⁰

This way of thinking was prefigured in Hegel’s philosophy. Engels claimed that the “great merit” of “the Hegelian system” was that with it, for the “first time,” the

“whole natural, historical and spiritual world was presented as a process, that is, as in constant motion, change, transformation and development; and the attempt was made to show the internal interconnections in this motion and development.... It now became the task of thought to follow the gradual stages of this process through all its devious ways, and to trace out the inner regularities running through all its apparently fortuitous phenomena.”⁴⁹¹

Marx also possessed an idea of a *telos* which spans the natural world and human history, and he thought that human beings are the pinnacle of natural development. This is evident in his view of the origin and dissolution of “the system of bourgeois economy” which he treated as a kind of natural life-process, the “ultimate result” of which is “its negation.”⁴⁹² This “system” of human life is a conditional necessity for another form of life: “Just as...the pre-bourgeois phases [of

and depth. A conflict then sets in between the material development of production and its social form” (Marx 1981, 1023-24).

⁴⁹⁰ Marx 1976, 92.

⁴⁹¹ Engels 1934, 30.

⁴⁹² Marx 1973, 712. He claimed to have recognized ways in which “Capital...works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production” (Ibid., 700).

life] appear as *merely historical*, i.e. suspended presuppositions, so do the contemporary conditions of production likewise appear as engaged in *suspending themselves* and hence in positing the *historic presuppositions* for a new state of society.”⁴⁹³ After all, Marx claimed that capitalism’s “historical mission” is to “ruthlessly expand the productivity of human labour, to drive it onwards to geometrical progression.”⁴⁹⁴ However, its tendency to provide the foundation for the flowering of a “higher” form of social life implies that while the life-process of capitalism is akin to any other natural process, it is not simply a ‘natural’ process because it involves the activity of human *subjects* which, moreover, the natural sciences in their conventional form are not equipped to comprehend because of insufficient ontological and anthropological premises. Nevertheless, according to Marx “the material transformation of the economic conditions” of all social forms “can be determined with the precision of natural science” and he thought that such transformations “must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production.”⁴⁹⁵

It has been well established (to a fault in some literature) that Marx thought “the development of the contradictions of a given historical form of production is the only historical way in which it can be dissolved and then reconstructed on a new basis.”⁴⁹⁶ He thought that such “contradictions” within the capitalist mode of production “lead to explosions, cataclysms,” and “crises” which are “regularly recurring catastrophes” that “lead to their repetition on a higher

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 461. As Whitehead maintained, “we have some knowledge of that counter-tendency which converts the decay of one order into the birth of its successor” (Whitehead 1929, 90).

⁴⁹⁴ Marx 1981, 371. Capitalism is therefore “untrue to its mission as soon as it starts to inhibit the development of productivity” (Ibid.).

⁴⁹⁵ Marx 1977, 21.

⁴⁹⁶ Marx 1976, 619. As for the capitalist system, Marx was intent on demonstrating that there exists a “contradiction between the general social power into which capital has developed and the private power of the individual capitalists over these social conditions of production” because this is a “development” that “also contains the solution to this situation” by “simultaneously [raising] the conditions of production into general, communal, social conditions” (Marx 1981, 373).

scale, and finally to” its “violent overthrow.”⁴⁹⁷ The ‘economic laws’ of distinct modes of production differ, however. Marx made it clear that “a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical,” is not sufficient for comprehending how “events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historic surroundings” will lead “to totally different results.”⁴⁹⁸ But as McCarney pointed out, with a “historical dialectic” of the sort involved in ‘Historical Materialism’,

“it is not enough that there should be contradictions continually coming into view and going under. There must be an immanent, progressive logic to the sequence of changes. What is required is, not simply an indefinite sequence of randomly revolving contradictions but, an essentially directed movement. In the language of the dialectical tradition, the question is how one can speak of reason in history.”⁴⁹⁹

Presented in this way, however, the relationship between Marx’s ontology and his teleological view of history is set up for misinterpretation because even though there is evidence which indicates that Marx thought there is ‘reason in history’ and that “the social antagonisms that spring from the natural laws of capitalist production” are “tendencies winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity,” it must be emphasized that he did not use this ontology, directly or indirectly, as a kind of philosophical guarantee for the emergence of freedom.⁵⁰⁰ To do so would distort the substance of his concept of human freedom as the

⁴⁹⁷ Marx 1973, 750.

⁴⁹⁸ Marx 1975c, 294.

⁴⁹⁹ McCarney 1987, 175.

⁵⁰⁰ Marx 1976, 91. The view that proletarian revolution is inevitable is characteristic of the old school of ‘historical dialectics’ which developed in the Soviet Union. Moseley and Smith claim that “the old Marxian dialectics (or Diamat)” was “concerned primarily with the influence of Hegel on Marx’s theory of history, and the eventual triumph of socialism” (Moseley and Smith 2014, 1). And according to McCarney it was the Marxism of the Second International which thought that the “major achievement” of “Marxist social theory” is “the discovery of scientific

‘independent’ development of “self-conscious reason” (which, ultimately, is achieved by “universally developed individuals”). And after all, Marx claimed that “*History* does *nothing*” and “is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims”; i.e., for him history is “*nothing but* the activity of [humanity] pursuing [its] aims.”⁵⁰¹ Thus it is ultimately imprecise to say that Marx thought there is a telos of *history* because history moves and changes in accordance with *our* activity and *our* development. The “historical dialectic” that he sublated from Hegel is not simply an external process of change in the cosmos which mechanically determines our behaviour in order to bring about freedom; on the contrary, it involves the development of “the human mind”—“self-conscious reason”—through “estrangement,” even though it is a process that brings about this development for the most part without conscious intention.⁵⁰² Thus the form which the ontological idea that “Reason directs the world” takes in Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ does not entail being resigned to some kind of blind fate.

Marx had no need for prophetic assertions about the “impending revolution” because, of course, *it is* (allegedly) *impending*. He did not proclaim that a successful revolution would inevitably happen apart from moments of revolutionary fervor such as in the *Manifesto* (during the revolutionary period of 1848)⁵⁰³ or in *Capital* (which was intended to be a “scientific”

laws of history and, specifically, of the mechanism that ensures the downfall of capitalism and its replacement by socialism” (McCarney 1990, 1).

⁵⁰¹ Marx 1975b, 93.

⁵⁰² Consider, for example, Hegel’s idea that “the grand interest of Spirit in History, is to attain an unlimited immanence of subjectivity—by an absolute antithesis to attain complete harmony” (Hegel 1956, 174).

⁵⁰³ In his book *History, Labour and Freedom*, Gerald Cohen incorrectly claims that “Marx and Engels considered it inevitable that a socialist revolution would overturn capitalism” (he cites the statement in the *Manifesto* that the “fall [of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” as evidence of this) (Cohen 1988, 51). Karl Löwith also claims that the *Manifesto* is “eschatological in its framework, and prophetic in its attitude,” and he went so far as to say that it “is only in Marx’s ‘ideological’ consciousness that all history is a history of class struggles, while the real driving force behind this conception is a transparent messianism which has its unconscious root in Marx’s own being, even in his race. He was a Jew of Old Testament stature.... It is the old Jewish messianism and prophetism...and Jewish insistence on absolute righteousness which explain the idealistic basis of Marx’s materialism” (Löwith 1949, 38, 44).

exposition of the immanent manifestation of proletarian revolution from within capitalist society).⁵⁰⁴ Ultimately, Marx only maintained that there are discernable tendencies toward a revolutionary transformation of society because from his perspective both the material conditions and the subjectivity that was going to bring it about were already in the process of formation—a subject, of course, to whom he thought he was speaking. Thus from his perspective it is allegedly self-evident that *if* freedom is going to be achieved, we have to bring it about with consciousness and will. To suggest that freedom is inevitable on Marx’s premises is to suggest, in effect, that it has *already* become realized, but unlike Hegel who thought that the “infinite purpose” has already been accomplished,⁵⁰⁵ Marx’s work puts forth the idea that the “dialectic” which is evident in the record of history and modern capitalism in particular only entails that the experience of freedom is truly *possible*.

This discussion overlaps with a relatively common objection to the teleological notion that ‘Reason is at work’ in history; namely, that it is *theological* and that history thereby becomes a kind of theodicy. This, of course, would be an expression of alienation, a projection of our own purposeful activity onto some *external*, ‘divine’ Subject which resides ‘above’ and ‘beyond’ nature and humanity. Löwith, for instance, claimed that

“Historical materialism is essentially, though secretly, a history of fulfilment and salvation in terms of social economy. What seems to be a scientific discovery...is, on

⁵⁰⁴ He mentioned, for example, “the inevitable conquest of political power by the working class” (Marx 1976, 619).

⁵⁰⁵ “The accomplishing of the infinite purpose,” Hegel claimed, “consists...only in sublating the illusion that it has not yet been accomplished. The good, the absolute good, fulfills itself eternally in the world, and the result is that it is already fulfilled in and for itself, and does not need to wait upon us for this to happen. This is the illusion in which we live, and at the same time it is this illusion alone that is the activating element upon which our interest in the world rests. It is within its own process that the Idea produces that illusion for itself; it posits an other confronting itself, and its action consists in sublating that illusion. Only from this error does the truth come forth, and herein lies our reconciliation with error and with finitude. Otherness or error, as sublated, is itself a necessary moment of the truth, which can only be in that it makes itself into its own result” (Hegel 1991b, 286).

the contrary, from the first to the last sentence inspired by an eschatological faith.... It would have been quite impossible to elaborate the vision of the proletariat's messianic vocation on a purely scientific basis and to inspire millions of followers by a bare statement of facts.”⁵⁰⁶

Teleology in general is often associated with theological notions of a Providential ‘Designer’ God guiding the process as a conscious agent separate from us. These ideas can be attributed to the medieval Scholastic tradition which used Aristotelian teleology to bolster the Christian view, resulting in a “divine teleological cosmology.”⁵⁰⁷ It is generally accepted that this idea of teleology is absent from Marx’s work. In fact, this is likely the sort of “teleology” that Marx spoke about in an 1861 letter to Ferdinand Lassalle, claiming that its presence in the natural sciences was “dealt a mortal blow” by Darwin.⁵⁰⁸ The “rational meaning” of teleology that Marx alludes to in this letter is the form of “teleology” in his own thinking. Nothing like Hegel’s theological overtones and invocation of “the superior design of providence,” as Kosík put it, will be found in Marx’s writings on history.⁵⁰⁹ But Marx did not view the history of human development as a Darwinian process of natural evolution, i.e., as a series of random mutations and adaptations governed ultimately by a blind process of natural selection. Even though it is

⁵⁰⁶ Löwith 1949, 45. He claims that “the term ‘philosophy of history’ is used to mean a systematic interpretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed toward an ultimate meaning. Taken in this sense, philosophy of history is, however, entirely dependent on theology of history, in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfilment and salvation but then philosophy of history cannot be a ‘science’; for how could one verify the belief in salvation on scientific grounds?” (Ibid., 1).

⁵⁰⁷ Meikle 1985, 167.

⁵⁰⁸ Marx 1985, 247. As Wood claimed, “Marx and Engels respect for Darwin...rests on the fact that he exhibited a progressive historical movement in the natural world, and provided a purely naturalistic account of biological organization, undercutting explanations of natural teleology in theological or supernaturalist terms” (Wood 2004, 109).

⁵⁰⁹ Kosík 1969, 65.

evident that Darwin was influential for Marx's view of human life and development,⁵¹⁰ Marx did not base his 'Historical Materialism' on the kind of 'materialist' ontology found in Darwin's theory of natural evolution. The Darwinian view of natural life is based on what Marx described as "the abstract materialism"—i.e., what Whitehead called 'scientific materialism'—"of natural science" which "excludes the historical process," and on this basis we cannot adequately account for our development into a "universal," "free being."⁵¹¹

It is thus not accurate to claim that Marx understood history as a series of ultimately 'meaningless' transitions between cultural form and social modes of life. For him, history was not merely a "banal 'succession of generations'" with "no more meaning than the dreary genealogy of whales," as Daniel Bensaïd argued.⁵¹² Bensaïd was referring to the idea that

"History is nothing but the succession of separate generations, each of which uses the materials...the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity."⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ For example, Marx claimed that "Darwin has directed attention to the history of natural technology, i.e., the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which serve as the instruments of production for sustaining their life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man in society, of organs that are the material basis of every particular organization of society, deserve equal attention?" (Marx 1976, 493).

⁵¹¹ Cf. Merleau-Ponty's claim that "Marxism, as we know, recognizes that nothing in history is absolutely contingent, that historical facts do not arise from a sum of mutually foreign circumstances but form an intelligible system and present a rational development. But the characteristic thing about Marxism—unlike theological philosophies or even Hegelian idealism—is its admission that humanity's return to order, the final synthesis, is not necessitated but depends upon a revolutionary act whose certainty is not guaranteed by any divine decree or by any metaphysical structure of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 120).

⁵¹² Bensaïd 2002, 15.

⁵¹³ Marx and Engels 1998, 58.

Misreading this is unavoidable if it is taken in abstraction from Marx's ontology and philosophical anthropology because the change of circumstances and activity correspond to our "universal" development which is bound by laws that govern our species-life, including the transitions in our development.⁵¹⁴ In so far as the realization of "human nature" (freedom) is our 'end', there are necessary stages in our development; i.e., *if* there is progress in the process of our development, certain necessary stages must be reached and surpassed, and Marx thought that there was evidence of such progress. How are we to make sense of Marx's claim, for instance, that the "*forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world" if we assume that he thought all of our activity throughout history is simply 'meaningless'?⁵¹⁵ Substantial evidence indicates that, for Marx, our existence has an 'end' or 'purpose', and yet interpretive positions akin to Bensaïd's are quite common. István Mészáros, for example, claimed that for Marx "history had to remain *radically open* to qualify as history in order to make any sense at all of 'self-activity' and 'freedom' in terms of the objective potentialities of human self-realization."⁵¹⁶ This notion of an open-ended movement is inadequate because Marx thought that *freedom* is humanity's 'end' or 'purpose' and it does not take account of the fact that certain kinds of society achieve freer relations and activities. An example of the inherent absurdity of such positions can be found explicitly in Bensaïd's claim that in Marx's work we do not find "a speculative philosophy of history" but rather "a deconstruction of universal History" which

"opens the way to a history that promises no salvation, offers no guarantee to redress injustice—not even the faintest possibility. A profane history emerges whose

⁵¹⁴ Cf. Marx's claim that at "a certain stage of development" the mode of production founded on the small-scale industry of peasants and artisans "brings into the world the material means of its own destruction. From that moment, new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society, forces and passions which feel themselves to be fettered by that society. It has to be annihilated; it is annihilated" (Marx 1976, 928).

⁵¹⁵ Marx 1964, 141.

⁵¹⁶ Mészáros 2011, 36.

trajectory is unsettled, in that it is determined conjointly by struggle and necessity.

Hence there is no question of founding a new philosophy of some unidirectional history.”⁵¹⁷

If Marx thought that there was “not even the faintest possibility” of freedom, how are we to explain his life’s work? If the possibility of progress exists there must be an ‘end’ toward which we can progress.⁵¹⁸

While “Reason” does not function as Providence in Marx’s writing it is evident that attitudes toward revolutionary politics akin to religious faith exist nonetheless and that the ontological idea that “Reason directs the world” could indeed be mistakenly treated like some kind of omnipotent and inexorable Providential Will. It seems that even McCarney had a quasi-religious striving for salvation brought on by misgivings about the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and the development of “communism.” He did not think capitalism is doing what Marx said it would and was lamenting the absence of the revolutionary subject required to carry out a revolution. He went so far as to maintain that “some version of the cunning of reason” is “needed” to supplement Marx’s revolutionary social theory by being “placed explicitly at the center of the conceptual field,” “generalized in its application,” and “extended to the revolution of socialism.”⁵¹⁹ He did not recognize the extent to which Marx had critically reworked this idea into his writings—aside from “isolated and opportunist, or at least not fully theorized, uses”—

⁵¹⁷ Bensaïd 2002, 2-3.

⁵¹⁸ Cf. McCarney’s claim that “At the most general level of all it is uncontroversially clear that” Marx “shares” with Hegel “the vision of history as the history of human emancipation. It is for him a record of progress leading to ‘that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom’” (McCarney 1991, 22).

⁵¹⁹ He claims that it is “a device with which Marx was perfectly familiar” and he insightfully pointed out that this “device has nothing mysterious or arbitrary about it in Hegel’s scheme. On the contrary, it is directly grounded in, and required by, his basic ontological principles.... In the form that it is historically significant, reason is present in human beings as a ‘unconscious universal instinct’” (McCarney 2000, 73, 72).

although, to his credit, he claims that *if* it were transferred into Marx's thought, it "seems likely that a concept of Spirit as incorporating, and driven by, an impulse of reason, is indispensable."⁵²⁰ While this is true, Starosta's claim that an "*extrinsic* application of a *general* dialectic" of "Spirit" is not sufficient for Marx's critique of political economy is also valid.⁵²¹ But is the "dialectical" development of "Spirit" or "mind" in history only capable of being *extrinsically* applied? McCarney was on the right path to answering this question. He claimed that if "Spirit is read immanently and anthropologically," it "will not present a theoretical difficulty, but at most a shock"⁵²² to conventional ways of thinking."⁵²³ Indeed, "Spirit" must be read this way—Marx identified humanity with "mind."⁵²⁴

Marx's work does not suggest that the revolution will be brought about by some kind of estranged cosmic-*voũç*. We cannot rely on the ontological idea that "Reason directs the world" as if it were a blind faith in an omniscient force tending the light at the end of the tunnel of human history; but it is evident that Marx thought he could see that light nonetheless. After all, he claimed that as "the immanent laws of capitalist production" proceed to unfold in the world—intelligible laws which are "reason" implicit in the phenomena of capitalism—"the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 73-4.

⁵²¹ Starosta 2015, 6.

⁵²² In the words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue?" (Nietzsche 1996, 14).

⁵²³ McCarney 2000, 74. "The real problem," he continues, "is whether...Spirit can after all be detached from the Idea so as to form the basis of a viable, self-contained theory" (Ibid.).

⁵²⁴ Cf. Hegel's claim regarding the "question of *perfectibility* and of the *education of the human race*": "Those who have proclaimed this perfectibility have had some inkling of the nature of spirit, which is to have know thyself as the law of its *being*, and as it comprehends what *it is*, to assume a higher shape than that which its being originally consisted. But for those who reject this thought, spirit has remained an empty word, and history has remained a superficial play of *contingent* and allegedly 'merely human' aspirations and passions" (Hegel 1991, 372-373).

organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production.”⁵²⁵ Of course he may be wrong about this, but if it is determined that he is right then we will have to admit that there is indeed someone tending the light: you and I and everyone else who have ‘become like one of us’, as it were—i.e., “universally developed individuals” living a “free” life.

⁵²⁵ Marx 1976, 929.

Chapter Five – Revolutionary Subjectivity

*“Have courage, for life is striding
To endless life along;
Stretched by inner fire,
Our sense becomes transfigured.
One day the stars above
Shall flow in golden wine,
We will enjoy it all,
And as stars we will shine.
The love is given freely,
And Separation is no more.
The whole life heaves and surges
Like a sea without a shore....”*

- Novalis⁵²⁶

1. The Subjective Dimension of Revolutionary Transformation

According to Marx “the communist proletarians who revolutionise society” put “the relations of production and the forms of intercourse on a new basis—i.e., on themselves as new people, on their new mode of life.”⁵²⁷ The subjectivity of the working class in capitalist society—like the subjectivity of all individuals in all societies—is internally related to the definite character of social relations and conditions of life-activity that they live within. It is thus also a historical product like the revolution itself, which Marx depicts as the result of a broader

⁵²⁶ Novalis 2015.

⁵²⁷ Marx and Engels 1998, 230.

historical process whereby we transform the socio-natural world of life-activity and our own “inner world” simultaneously. In his view the specific form of “estrangement” that we experience as wage-labourers develops capacities that are required to engage in the “revolutionary practice” through which revolutionary subjectivity develops further. Of course, revolutionary subjectivity is not the character of individuality that will populate an “advanced phase of communist society.” The “present generation,” Marx claimed, “must perish in order to make room for the [individuals] who are equal to a new world.”⁵²⁸ Revolutionary subjects are the individuals that will initiate the revolution by overthrowing the capitalist order and utilizing the productive forces of social labour in the context of new, freer relations that take the place of the oppressive capitalist relations of dominance and servitude. They establish conditions through which, over time, we will remove any remaining barriers to the full and free development of everyone.

Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity centers on the developmental transformation of two particular aspects of human individuality: the productive capacities required to appropriate the knowledge objectified in the productive forces, which includes the technical skill required to use them and which also develops further in the act of appropriation; and ethical capacities, i.e., the development of a state of character required for the social relations which are necessary to initiate the revolution, including for the specific way that the working class must unite in order to carry out the revolutionary appropriation of the productive forces and reorientation of social life. He also thought that general intellectual development accompanies the growth of these capacities, but in the literature on Marx’s theory of revolution there tends to be an overemphasis on revolutionary *consciousness*. For him, the development of “consciousness” about our

⁵²⁸ Marx 2010b, 112.

essentially collective struggle and the necessary character of the collective solution involves a transformation of what Hegel termed the “sensuous will” along with an expansion of thought.

Marx’s writing puts forth the idea that the development of revolutionary subjectivity involves a mental-psychological process. This is expressed, for instance, in his depiction of “greed” as an essential factor in the formation of the productive capacity that he called “general industriousness.” In short, this is an “indifference” to the “content” of labour insofar as we are receiving wages, which is a kind of “versatility” that is required for the revolutionary process. The ethical character of revolutionary subjects required for the revolutionary appropriation of the productive forces beyond the character of capitalist relations of production also involves a mental-psychological transformation of this sort. In accordance with his philosophical anthropology, it entails the development of the “so-called spiritual and moral senses” such as “will” and “love.” This alteration of subjectivity underlies Marx’s emphasis on the dissolution of the identity of revolutionary subjects themselves as a result of the revolution,⁵²⁹ but the kind of psychological transformation that Marx envisioned does not only begin after the ‘socio-political’ revolution has reached a ‘culminating point’. Instead, he thought that the “proletariat goes through various stages of development” both during and leading up to revolutionary activity.⁵³⁰ Marx does not elaborate in detail about this but we are able to determine that in his view the development of revolutionary subjectivity is brought about through the process of “estranged” wage-labour. It is this definite form of social life-activity in capitalism which allegedly leads to

⁵²⁹ Cf. Lukács claim that the “*proletariat only perfects itself by annihilating and transcending itself, by creating the classless society through the successful conclusion of its own class struggle*. The struggle for this society, in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is merely a phase, is not just a battle waged against an external enemy, the bourgeoisie. It is equally the struggle of the proletariat *against itself*: against the devastating and degrading effects of the capitalist system upon its class consciousness. The proletariat will only have won the real victory when it has overcome these effects within itself” (Lukács 1971, 80).

⁵³⁰ Marx 2010, 75.

the development of a degree of “reason” required to initiate “revolutionary practice” which is then further developmental.

2. The Influence of Hegel and Aristotle on Marx’s Idea of Humanity’s Development Through “Estrangement”

Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity was strongly shaped by his critical engagement with Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. However, the interpretative literature on this influence tends to overlook or underemphasize the extent to which Marx appropriated Hegel’s representation of the life and death struggle between oppressed labourers and their oppressive exploiters as a fundamentally mental-psychological process. Hegel claimed, for instance, that within this oppressive socio-productive relationship the labourer “rids himself of attachment to natural existence” and their “natural will.”⁵³¹ He thought the oppressed labourers were driven to enter into a state of deferred desire by a *fear* that completely consumes them—the fear of death.⁵³² In his view a consequence of this is that “the slave,” in “the service of the master, works off his individualist self-will, overcomes the inner immediacy of appetite, and in this divestment of self and in ‘the fear of his lord’ makes ‘the beginning of wisdom’—the passage to universal self-consciousness.”⁵³³

⁵³¹ Hegel 1977, 117.

⁵³² Hegel claimed that “this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord” (Ibid.). Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “death is the most fearful of all things; for it is the end” (Aristotle 1998, 64). According to Hegel, in the labourer’s experience “everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations,” and through their “service” the labourer “*actually* brings this about” (Ibid.). Cf. Marx’s claim that “all repose, all fixity and all security as far as the worker’s life-situation is concerned” is undermined in capitalist society (Marx 1976, 617-18).

⁵³³ Hegel 1971, 175. In the process of elaborating this Hegel also touched on its significance for the development of the human species overall: “Since the slave works for the master and therefore not in the exclusive interest of his own individuality, his desire is expanded into being not only the desire of this particular individual but also the desire of another. Accordingly, the slave rises above the selfish individuality of his natural will.... This subjugation of the slave’s egotism forms the *beginning* of true human freedom. This quaking of the single, isolated will, the

An analysis of Marx's critical appropriation of Hegel's idea of the intersubjective nature of class struggle makes the mental-psychological aspect of it in Marx's work more apparent. Consider, for instance, his idea of the "life-and-death struggle" between bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁵³⁴ He claimed that it is the "poverty of the proletarian" which "assumes an acute, sharp form" and "drives him into a life-and-death struggle, makes him a revolutionary."⁵³⁵ Marx did not think of "poverty" only in the "material" sense; he also described a "spiritual" form of "poverty" which suggests that he thought of it from a mental-psychological standpoint.⁵³⁶ Thus the life-and-death nature of the class struggle can be conceived from this perspective as well. In other words, the class struggle involves an 'internal' struggle which is internally related to our struggles in the life-world of 'socio-natural' practice.

Class-consciousness, of course, is unthinkable without at least implicitly presupposing the existence of subjective-mental life. After all, Marx thought that the revolutionary working class is becoming conscious of their power as a class and the real potential for independence from economic bondage under the rule of the capitalists. This perspective is unlikely to arouse controversy among scholars of Marx's work, although there is no consensus regarding how the development of revolutionary subjectivity and its relation to practice should be theorized within the bounds of Marx's 'Historical Materialism'. Marx did not provide a substantial amount of elaborate detail about his view of the relationship between subjectivity and practice, nor the

feeling of the worthlessness of egotism, the habit of obedience, is a necessary moment in the education of all men" (Ibid.).

⁵³⁴ Marx referred to "the fear felt by the bourgeoisie of the inevitable life-and-death struggle between itself and the proletariat" and also articulated class struggle in general as such a struggle (Marx 2010c, 371). He claimed, for instance, that there can be "no peace" between "feudal and aristocratic society" and "modern bourgeois society" because their "material interests and needs require a life-and-death struggle in which one society must win, the other go under"; and that the French bourgeoisie had attempted to "indict the proletariat retrospectively for failing to rise in a bloody life and death struggle on its behalf!" (Marx 2010, 259-60; Marx 2010b, 225).

⁵³⁵ Marx and Engels 1998, 236.

⁵³⁶ Marx 1964, 141.

developmental process of revolutionary subjectivity in particular, but his writings contain some definite ideas about this nonetheless. Elements from the philosophies of Aristotle and Hegel that inspired Marx can be drawn on to enrich our understanding of his thinking on this matter as well. According to Hegel, a key moment in this process occurs as “consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence” from its exploitative oppressor.⁵³⁷ Even though Marx maintained that there are significant—but not insurmountable—barriers hindering the wage-worker’s self-awareness and experience of their objectified power in the product that they produce in capitalist relations of production, the influence of Hegel’s representation of the maturation of revolutionary independence is evident in Marx’s writing:

“The recognition of the products as its own, and the judgment that its separation from the conditions of its realization is improper—forcibly imposed—is an enormous [advance in] awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he *cannot be the property of another*, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.”⁵³⁸

However, there is a depth to Marx’s idea of the wage-workers’ revolutionary independence that is not normally taken into consideration because it involves a mental-psychological dimension of

⁵³⁷ *Phenomenology*, 118. The worker “posits *himself* as a negative in the permanent order of things, and thereby becomes *for himself*, someone existing on his own account.... [In] fashioning the thing, he becomes aware...that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right. The shape does not become something other than himself through being made external to him.... Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own. For this reflection, the two moments of fear and service as such, as also that of formative activity, are necessary, both being at the same time in a universal mode” (Hegel 1977, 118-19).

⁵³⁸ Marx 1973, 462-63.

human life-activity that he left undertheorized. He thought that money plays a role in the development of this independence because since it is “the worker himself who converts the money into whatever use-values he desires”—i.e., since “it is he who buys commodities as he wishes”—the wage worker “acts as a free agent; he must pay his own way; he is responsible to himself for the way he spends his wages” and thus “*learns to control himself, in contrast to the slave, who needs a master.*”⁵³⁹

The influence of Aristotle is perceptible in this idea of self-transformative life-activity because the development of independence through the use of money, i.e., through habitual practice, is analogous to Aristotle’s idea of “moral virtue” which “comes about as a result of habit.”⁵⁴⁰ As Aristotle claimed, “the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”⁵⁴¹ This also applies to the development of what Marx described as “that revolutionary boldness which flings at its adversary the defiant words, *I am nothing and I should be everything.*”⁵⁴² Marx’s higher fusion of Aristotelian and Hegelian philosophy suggests that this revolutionary character requires the development of “courage,” which is a “moral virtue.”⁵⁴³ Aside from the ethical character of revolutionary subjects, Marx’s writing indicates that he also

⁵³⁹ Marx 1976, 1033. Marx also claimed that “piece-wages” in particular give a “wider scope” to “individuality” which “tends to develop both that individuality, and with it the worker’s sense of liberty, independence and self-control, and also the competition of workers with each other” (Ibid., 697).

⁵⁴⁰ Aristotle 1998, 28. Aristotle claimed, for example, that “by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust” (Ibid., 29).

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁵⁴² Marx 1994, 37.

⁵⁴³ According to Aristotle we become brave “by doing brave acts” and he defined it as “a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence” (Aristotle 1998, 29, 63). A “brave” person “faces” and “fears the right things and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time,” and feels “confidence under the corresponding conditions”; “for the brave man feels and acts according to the merits of the case and in whatever way the rule [*logos*] directs,” i.e., “as courage directs” (Ibid., 65-66). Marx’s notes indicate that he thought of this as a virtue (cf. Marx 1964, 169).

took the mental-psychological dimension of the development of revolutionary productive capacities into consideration.

3. Revolutionary Productive Capacities

Marx thought that the revolutionary appropriation of the productive forces of social labour by the working class involves the development of the abilities required to collectively control them in a manner consistent with the initiation of a “communist organization of society.” In his view the process of appropriating the knowledge objectified in these forces, and attempting to exercise the technical capacities associated with their use, further develops the ability required for it. In particular, he claimed that

“private property can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, precisely because the existing form of intercourse and the existing productive forces are all-embracing and only individuals that are developing in an all-round fashion can appropriate them, i.e., can turn them into free manifestations of their lives.”⁵⁴⁴

As a feature of revolutionary subjectivity this “all-round fashion” of individual development is more accurately described as the workers’ “indifference to the particularity of labour.”⁵⁴⁵ The

⁵⁴⁴ Marx and Engels 1998, 464. “This appropriation is first determined by the object to be appropriated, the productive forces, which have been developed to a totality and which only exist within a universal intercourse. Even from this aspect alone, therefore, this appropriation must have a universal character corresponding to the productive forces and the intercourse. The appropriation of these forces is itself nothing more than the development of the individual capacities corresponding to the material instruments of production. The appropriation of a totality of instruments of production is, for this very reason, the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves” (Ibid., 96).

⁵⁴⁵ In *Capital*, Marx included a statement on this matter by a French labourer who went to California for work: “I could never have believed that I was capable of working at all the trades I practiced in California.... As a result of this discovery that I am fit for any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusc and more of a man” (Marx 1976, 618). Cf. Marx 1973, 104; Marx 1981, 289; Marx 1976, 1013-14.

development of this “indifference” is facilitated by the tendency to ‘deskill’ the production process which increases the relative ease of transition from one occupation to another. In *The Poverty of Philosophy* he claimed that the “division of labour...engenders specialized functions, specialists” which is a kind of one-sided development—he called it “craft-idiocy”—but within the “automatic workshop” of capitalist production “labour has...lost its specialized character,” and “the moment every special development stops, the need for universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to be felt.”⁵⁴⁶ He thought this was a positive consequence of the “estrangement” experienced by wage-labourers because the “automatic workshop wipes out specialists and craft idiocy.”⁵⁴⁷ Immature forms of the “rational” indifference to the particularity of labour that Marx thought would be achieved in the “communist organization of society”—i.e., “the totally developed individual”—germinate through “estrangement” in capitalism.⁵⁴⁸

In tandem with this process, the “general mania for money” encourages the movement which develops our “*versatility*,” i.e., the “perfect indifference towards the particular content of work and the free transition from one branch of industry to the next.”⁵⁴⁹ This aspect of the “estrangement” experienced by wage-labourers which develops “self-conscious reason” is thus fundamentally mental-psychological and socio-practical. The key significance that Marx ascribed to the mental-psychological dimension for the development of revolutionary productive capacities makes it worthwhile to quote him at length:

⁵⁴⁶ Marx and Engels 1976, 190.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Marx 1976, 618.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 1034.

“Greed, as the urge of all, in so far as everyone wants to make money, is only created by general wealth. Only in this way can the general mania for money become the wellspring of general, self-reproducing wealth. When labour is wage-labour, and its direct aim is money, then general wealth is *posited* as its aim and object.... Money as aim here becomes the means of general industriousness.... In this way the real sources of wealth are opened up. When the aim of labour is not a particular product standing in a particular relation to the particular needs of the individual, but money, wealth in its general form, then, firstly the individual’s industriousness knows no bounds; it is indifferent to its particularity, and takes on every form which serves the purpose.... It is clear, therefore, that when wage-labour is the foundation, money...acts productively.... General industriousness is possible only where every act of labour produces general wealth, not a particular form of it; where therefore the individual’s reward, too, is money.”⁵⁵⁰

Marx claimed that “the sole purpose of work in the eyes of the wage-labourer” is money, and since money is “a specific quantity of exchange-value” from which “every particular mark of use-value has been expunged,” workers are “wholly indifferent towards the *content*” of their labour.⁵⁵¹ This is a key ingredient in the developmental context of the proletariat as opposed to the slave. Marx claimed that wage-labour is playing a vital role in the historical emergence of “general industriousness as the general property of the new species” and that slavery can “never create *general industriousness*” because it fosters the perspective that freedom is “loafing.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ Marx 1973, 224.

⁵⁵¹ Marx 1976, 1033. Cf. Marx 1973, 163.

⁵⁵² Marx 1973, 325-326. Cf. Marx 1976, 1014.

In contemporary literature, Guido Starosta places a strong emphasis on Marx's idea of productive subjectivity, although the mental-psychological dimension of the development of the productive capacities of revolutionary subjects is generally overlooked.⁵⁵³ Starosta recognizes and attempts to explore the relationship between subjective powers and the 'socio-material' productive basis of society⁵⁵⁴ but he fails to notice the depth of Marx's idea of subjectivity and mental-psychological life. To begin with, Starosta misinterprets Marx's idea that truly "universal" productive subjects can only exist in an "advanced phase of communist society" and not as revolutionary subjects.⁵⁵⁵ He does not place adequate emphasis on the "universality" of humanity in the sense of our "rational" and therefore "free" nature, i.e., that which makes our productive activity unique among animals that "also produce." In effect, Starosta condenses Marx's idea of human "universality" into the colloquial sense of the term (i.e., as all-rounded) and places excessive emphasis on productive capacities; e.g., he writes about "a *universal worker*, that is, a productive subject capable of taking part in any form of the human labour-process."⁵⁵⁶ Marx's idea of "general industriousness" incorporates the notion of "all-sided development" in this sense. However, as demonstrated in previous chapters, his idea of our "universality" involves all other aspects of human subjectivity.

⁵⁵³ He maintains that for Marx "productive subjectivity" is a uniquely human trait, and that in Marx's writing from 1844 "the content of the history of the human species consists in the development of the specific material powers of the human being as a working subject, that is, of *human productive subjectivity*" (Starosta 2013, 233). Thus for Starosta the "essence" of the "capitalist transformation of the production-process of human life lies in the mutation of the productive attributes of the collective labourer according to a determinate tendency: the individual organs of the latter eventually becoming *universal productive subjects*" (Ibid., 236).

⁵⁵⁴ He claimed, for example, that "it is on the fully-expanded universal character of human productive subjectivity that the *material basis* for the new society rests" (Ibid., 244).

⁵⁵⁵ Consider, for example, his claim that a "passage from the *Grundrisse* mentions that the universality of 'revolutionary' productive subjectivity must be the expression of a *scientific* consciousness, capable of organising work as 'an activity regulating all the forces of nature'" (Ibid., 247).

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 239. He also claimed that "Large-scale industry's tendency to produce an increasingly universal worker" is equal to "the disappearance of the technical necessity for a particularistic development of the worker's productive subjectivity" (Ibid., 240).

Marx thought the capitalist transformation of human subjectivity is more extensive than just the development of productive capacities. In particular, the development of our ethical character is an essential aspect of revolutionary subjectivity. Thus while the development of productive capacities is an integral subjective transformation for the revolutionary appropriation of the productive forces of social labour, the revolutionary character of this appropriation also requires a corresponding development of a more “rational” individual ethical character⁵⁵⁷ among members of the working class.

4. The Ethical Character of Revolutionary Subjectivity

The revolutionary appropriation of the productive forces requires the development of the ethical character of revolutionary subjects so as to advance beyond the relations of current society⁵⁵⁸ and reorganize economic life in a way that all of us can eventually be provided with what we require to develop “universally.” Marx’s writing indicates that he thought of it along the lines of a mental-psychological transformation related to our “sensuous will” and the development of “ratiocinative desire.” As is the case with revolutionary productive capacities, Marx thought that the ethical character of revolutionary subjects is developing through their life-practice in capitalism, including “revolutionary practice.”⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁷ Again, in keeping with Marx’s primary philosophical influences, this can be articulated as a greater degree of “moral virtuosity” *à la* Aristotle.

⁵⁵⁸ Consider, for example, the “workers’ desire to create the conditions for cooperative production” (Marx 2010c, 354).

⁵⁵⁹ He claimed, for instance, that the “advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association,” and that it “is one of the civilizing aspects of capital that it extorts...surplus labour in a manner and in conditions that are more advantageous to social relations and to the creation of elements for a new and higher formation” because “it creates the material means and the nucleus for relations that permit this surplus labour to be combined, in a higher form of society, with the greater reduction of the overall time devoted to material labour” (Marx 2010, 79; Marx 1981, 958).

In the “Provisional Rules” of the First International Marx described the emergent ethical character of revolutionary working class movements. He claimed that the “International Association and all individuals adhering to it...acknowledge truth, justice, and morality as the basis of their conduct towards each other, and towards all men, without regard to colour, to creed, or nationality.”⁵⁶⁰ He thought it was increasingly self-evident to working class individuals that “the cause of the producer is everywhere the same and its enemy everywhere the same, whatever its nationality (in whatever national garb),” and that their “efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.”⁵⁶¹ It would not be accurate to describe his view of revolutionary working people as though he thought they were acting ‘altruistically’ but they are not ‘selfish’ in the colloquial sense either insofar as he thought that workers were increasingly coming to experience each other’s need for emancipation as their own self-interest.⁵⁶² Ultimately, on Marx’s premises the reciprocal practice of the virtue of “justice” is the expression of a rational view of self-interest which is vital for a truly good existence.

Marx depicts this budding ethical character as partly expressed in the working class’ “need for society.” He thought it develops through our “revolutionary activity” which is instrumental in the development of the desire for such relations as ends-in-themselves. Marx claimed that

⁵⁶⁰ Marx 2010c, 83.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 264, 92.

⁵⁶² Like many interpreters, Mihailo Marković would misinterpret this as “abstract moralizing humanism” which he claimed is not “Marx’s standpoint” because he mistakenly thought that Marx “does not expect emancipation to be the consequence of a higher moral consciousness” but rather “the result of a social development which is unconscious and involuntary. The proletarians are not the agents of emancipation because they are morally superior and have noble and unselfish social aims” (Marković 1974, 173). Cf. Skillen’s more accurate claim that the “proletariat is the ‘revolutionary class’ because of its capacity to seize power and its disposition to organise society on a different, non-oppressive basis. It is the ‘universal class,’ not because its members obediently perform a cluster of Kantian duties, but because its actual, historically formed ‘inclinations’ correspond to the conditions for the realization of the human species’ potential. It needs no moralistic form because its particular needs are, and are increasingly felt to be humanity’s needs” (Skillen 1981, 156-57).

“Company, association, and conversation, which again has society as its end, are enough for them,” and their association, which was initially approached as a means for resisting capitalism,

“becomes an end.”⁵⁶³ Marx thought that he had recognized the embryo of “communist” social relations developing within the already existing “revolutionary activity” of the proletariat.⁵⁶⁴

While he did not elaborate at length about this character we can still determine that, in his view, even though “the first phase of communist society” will be “stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges,” in order to bring about the appropriation of the productive forces in a way that facilitates a life of abundant “universal” freedom—through which we will develop so that we are all ultimately recognized as free in our actual life-activity—the “first phase” of revolutionary transition must be brought about by a collectivity of revolutionary subjects that identify with all human beings and recognize that each individual is inherently free and an end-in-themselves. These revolutionary individuals are driven to act with the aim of remedying any situation in which human beings are subject to oppression and exploitation. As Marx claimed, “the emancipation of the class of producers is that of all human beings, without distinctions of sex or race.”⁵⁶⁵ This indicates that the subjectivity at the basis of the “*bourgeois*

⁵⁶³ Marx 1964, 155. Cf. Shlomo Avineri’s elaboration of this: “Organization and association, even considered apart from their immediate aims, constitute a crucial phase in the liberation of the workers. They change the worker, his way of life, his consciousness of himself and his society. They force him into contact with his fellow-workers, suggest to him that his fate is not a subjective, particular and contingent affair but part of a universal scheme of reality. They make him see in his fellow-proletarians not competitors for work and bread but brothers in suffering and ultimately victory, not means but co-equal ends” (Avineri 1968, 143).

⁵⁶⁴ Avineri claimed that “these proletarian associations are *in potentia* what future society will be in practice” and that they “offer a glimpse into future society” because they “create other-directedness and mutuality” (Ibid., 141-42). Cf. Skillen’s claim that “Marx tended to write as if it was solely in the struggle against the dominant class that the masses would gain the dispositions and capacities fitting them for self-emancipation. But...[if] the new society is to develop in the womb of the old, its embryo must do more than kick against the walls of the old; it will have to be the case that it has exercised virtues and acquired habits (traditions) that will be required in the new age” (Skillen 1981, 170). This “new age” has to be qualified as the initial phase of the revolutionary reorganization of society because further development is required for the dawn of the age of “true” freedom.

⁵⁶⁵ *First International and After*, 376. He thought that “the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation” because “the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are but modifications and consequences of this relation”; and that “the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour, that is, the sources of life, lies at the

right” which characterizes the social relations of the “first phase” of revolutionary transition has the aim of universal human emancipation driving it to reorganize society.⁵⁶⁶ Marx did not venture to comprehensively explain this aspect of the revolutionary process but his work suggests that the development of the “need for society” must be realised and transcended in order for the realisation of what he called the “*human need*” for “the *other* person as a person” to become widespread after a succession of post-revolutionary generations. The full development of the need for “the *other*” as a “person” as well as its satisfaction can only be achieved in the life-activity of an “advanced phase of communist society” in which “the human end-in-itself” is intersubjectively recognized and affirmed by all “universally developed individuals.”⁵⁶⁷

The picture of revolutionary individuals conveyed in Marx’s writing indicates that they could not be perfectly “just” because they are unable to practice “complete virtue” in relations with others and thus that they would have to rectify the lack of development which still remains in order to ‘complete’ the revolutionary transition; but it also indicates that a key factor of the motivation of these individuals is the recognition of all human beings as inherently free. He depicted the revolutionary reorganization of society (production, distribution, etc.) as leading to the further development of individuals, tending ultimately toward the “universal development” of everyone. On his premises the collective subjectivity animating the revolutionary process is consciously oriented toward revolutionary aims which would include feeling the need to make each other’s life better in accordance with the knowledge—which is developed through

bottom of servitude in all its forms, of all social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence” (Marx 1964, 118; Marx 2010c, 82). Cf. Fromm’s claim that the “revolutionary character is humanist in the sense that he experiences in himself all of humanity, and that nothing human is alien to him” (Fromm 1963, 165). Cf. *Ibid.*, 158.

⁵⁶⁶ Marx 2010c, 346.

⁵⁶⁷ Marx 1973, 488.

socializing with other workers—of what this essentially requires (the details of which will be determined democratically along the way in the process of creating these conditions).⁵⁶⁸

Marx did not elaborate the mental-psychological dimension of the process whereby we recognize everyone as potentially “universally developed,” i.e., as inherently “universal” and “free.” Hegel’s philosophy is relevant for explanatory purposes in this instance as well. He claimed that the “servile obedience” arising in response to the worker’s fear of the “Lord” is the beginning of wisdom—but only the *beginning*,

“because that to which the natural individuality of self-consciousness subjects itself is not the truly universal, rational will which is in and for itself, but the single, contingent will of another person. Here, then, only one moment of freedom is manifested, that of the negativity of the egoistic individuality; whereas the positive side of freedom attains actuality only when, on the one hand, the servile self-consciousness, freeing itself both from the individuality of the master and from its own individuality, grasps the absolutely rational in its universality which is independent of the particularity of the subjects.”⁵⁶⁹

Marx did not think that revolutionary subjects would be able to grasp “the absolutely rational in its universality” but his work suggests that the *aufhebung* of the workers’ “egoistic individuality” through “estrangement” facilitates the process of “revolutionary practice” in which he glimpsed “the brotherhood of man.” He claimed, for instance, that the experience of “poverty” in capitalism “causes the human being to experience the need of the greatest wealth—

⁵⁶⁸ Consider, for example, Marx’s claim that “the emancipation of the working classes requires their fraternal concurrence” (Marx 2010c, 81).

⁵⁶⁹ Hegel 1971, 175-6.

the *other* human being.”⁵⁷⁰ While he did not elaborate this point, his distinction between “material and spiritual wealth and poverty” is informative in this instance.⁵⁷¹ The “spiritual” form of “poverty” is connected to the experience of the need for “the *other* human being” because it involves a “passive bond,” i.e., a kind of *relation* with other individuals, which on the premises of Marx’s philosophical anthropology is something we are able experience due to our unique mental-psychological life.⁵⁷² He thought material poverty is also connected to the mental-psychological dimension of human life, although unlike its “spiritual” form he does not suggest that it leads to the further development of a “human” need. Consider, for example, his claim that the “material privation” of the working classes “dwarfs their moral as well as their physical stature.”⁵⁷³ Ultimately, his idea of the working class as the ‘universal class’⁵⁷⁴ contains an idea of the development of ethical character. Comprehending the process of this development on his premises requires a theorization of the mental-psychological dimension of it, but this element of his social philosophy remained undertheorized. As the final section of this chapter will demonstrate, the result of this is that a gap exists in his work which ultimately undermines the coherence of his revolutionary theory.

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “in poverty and other misfortunes men think friends are the only refuge” (Aristotle 1998, 192).

⁵⁷¹ Marx 1964, 144, 141.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 144. “Where a relationship exists, it exists for me. The animal has no ‘*relations*’ with anything, no relations at all. Its relation to others does not exist as a relation” (Marx 1967, 433).

⁵⁷³ Marx 2010c, 396.

⁵⁷⁴ Marx claimed that the working class claims “no *particular* right because no *particular* wrong but *unqualified* wrong is perpetrated on it,” invokes “no *traditional* title but only a *human* title,” “cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them,” and that it is “the *complete* loss of humanity” which “can only redeem itself through the *total redemption of humanity*” (Marx 1994, 38).

5. “Revolutionary Practice” and Vanguardism: the Limitations of the Idea that Revolutionary Theory is a “Guide To Action”

On Marx’s premises, revolutionary subjectivity implies “*revolutionary practice*” which he defined as the “coincidence of the changing of circumstances” and “self-change.”⁵⁷⁵ This “revolutionary activity” has developmental consequences for our subjectivity in ways that are necessary for carrying out a revolution. Marx claimed that for

“the production on a mass scale of...communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; the revolution is necessary, therefore...because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.”⁵⁷⁶

However, Marx’s writing indicates that he thought there is “revolutionary practice” before what is often conceived of as “the revolution,” i.e., as a kind of *culminating* moment when the class struggle comes to a head and the rule of private property and the bourgeois state is overthrown. It is in this broader sense of “revolutionary practice” that we should interpret his claim that “through a revolution...there develops the universal character and the energy of the proletariat, which are required to accomplish the appropriation, and the proletariat moreover rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society.”⁵⁷⁷ An issue arises, however, in so far as Marx’s idea of the “coincidence of the changing of circumstances” and

⁵⁷⁵ Marx and Engels 1998, 570. As David McNally claims, “the self-transforming powers of mass struggle” is “central to Marx’s view of revolution” (McNally 2006, 375).

⁵⁷⁶ Marx and Engels 1998, 60.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 97.

“self-change” poses an incomprehensible paradox for the kind of abstract thinking that Hegel called “the Understanding.” Such thinking is unable to comprehend the “dialectical” transformative process of revolutionaries who are “engaged in the revolutionary transformation of themselves and their material surroundings, in the creation of something which does not yet exist.”⁵⁷⁸ Marx’s claim that “revolutionary practice” can be “rationally understood” indicates that it is only comprehensible for “speculative” thinking.

We encounter an abstract rendering of the paradoxical “coincidence” at the basis of Marx’s idea of “revolutionary practice” in Michael Löwy’s *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx*. Löwy posited the notion of a culminating “moment of the revolution, during which the broad masses ‘change’ and become conscious of their role by changing circumstances through their action”—but this is just the process of revolutionary activity itself.⁵⁷⁹ While Marx indeed had an idea of a “decisive hour” in the process of the class struggle, Löwy’s formulation is spurious because it implies that the “moment of the revolution” is necessary for the process of “revolutionary practice.”⁵⁸⁰ On this basis we would have to posit it *ad infinitum*, in which case it would never begin—unless, of course, a Marxist vanguard would come along and guide the masses to this “moment.”

Lenin’s work serves as a classical example of vanguardist thought. In his pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* he stressed the “need for a strong revolutionary organization,” i.e., a Marxist “vanguard” composed of “*professional revolutionaries*” whose “attention must be devoted *principally* to the task of *raising* the workers to the level of revolutionaries.”⁵⁸¹ In his view the

⁵⁷⁸ Marx 2010b, 146.

⁵⁷⁹ Löwy 2005, 106.

⁵⁸⁰ Marx 2010, 77.

⁵⁸¹ Lenin 1943, 157, 147, 153.

“vanguard” is required “to bring political knowledge to the workers” and for “training the masses in revolutionary activity.”⁵⁸² Vanguardism has since become presupposed as a legitimate tendency among countless groups and independent scholars that consider themselves to be within the tradition of Marx’s thought,⁵⁸³ even though his idea of “revolutionary practice” is inconsistent with it. His third thesis on Feuerbach suggests that anyone who maintains a vanguardist position “forgets” that “the educator must...be educated.”⁵⁸⁴ This problem arises explicitly in Kant’s writing on the development of humanity. Kant put it thus:

“The human being must...be *educated* to be good. The one who educates [us] is, however, also a human being, one who also therefore is subject to the same brutish nature and is supposed to bring about that of which [they are] in need. This is the source of the constant deviation from [our] vocation, while [we] repeatedly [turn] back towards it.”⁵⁸⁵

Compare this to the following statement by Marx about a “speaker from the knightly estate” who was opposed to freedom of the press:

⁵⁸² Ibid., 112, 109. He claimed that “our very first and most imperative duty is to help train working class revolutionaries who will be on the same level in *regard to Party activity* as intellectual revolutionaries (we emphasize the words ‘in regard to Party activity,’ because although it is necessary, it is not so easy and not so imperative to bring the workers up to the level of intellectuals in other respects)” (Ibid., 153).

⁵⁸³ Even though different perspectives tend to stress the significance of the role of the vanguard more or less and define the scope of its activity differently, the principle is essentially the same.

⁵⁸⁴ Marx 1967, 401. Cf. Lenin’s claim that “We can and must *educate* workers (and university and high-school students) so as to enable them to understand us when we speak to them” (Lenin 1943, 154).

⁵⁸⁵ Kant 2006, 168. Kant also articulated this problem another way; he claimed that “the human being is an *animal* which, when he lives among others of his own species, *needs a master*.... But where does he find such a master? In no place other than in the human species. But such a master is just as much an animal in need of a master.... This task is thus the most difficult of all. Indeed, its perfect solution is impossible: nothing entirely straight can be fashioned from the crooked wood of which humankind is made” (Kant 2006, 9). Cf. Schiller’s reflection on an analogous paradox of human development: “Theoretical culture should engender practical culture, while practical culture is still the condition of theoretical culture? All improvement in the domain of politics should derive from the refinement of character—but how can character be refined under the influence of a barbaric state order?” (Schiller 2016, 29).

“In his view, true education consists in keeping a person wrapped up in a cradle throughout his life, for as soon as he learns to walk, he learns also to fall, and only by falling does he learn to walk. But if we all remain in swaddling-clothes, who is to wrap us in them? If we all remain in the cradle, who is to rock us? If we are all prisoners, who is the prison warder?”⁵⁸⁶

Thus while textual evidence suggests that Marx would agree, in a qualified way, with Kant’s claim that the “human being is capable of and requires education in the form of both instruction and discipline,” Marx’s idea of the “estrangement” that shapes our development from nature into human beings (e.g., “the severe discipline of capital, acting on succeeding generations”) avoids the problem of needing an ‘educator’ in the Kantian sense.⁵⁸⁷

Löwy’s *Theory of Revolution* contains awkward and inconsistent formulations about the self-emancipation of the proletariat and the role of a vanguard for consolidating this self-activity into a successful revolutionary “moment.” One of the many examples of this is his claim that the “communist’s” goal consists in “helping the proletariat to find, through its own historical practice, the path of communist revolution,” but the Party “cannot set itself above the masses and ‘make the revolution’ in their place.”⁵⁸⁸ This inconsistency is even present in a single sentence in which Löwy claims that Marx’s activity during the 1846-48 period “had a definite aim: to form a communist vanguard freed from utopian socialism and the ‘true’, conspiratorial, or ‘sentimental’ varieties, and to create, on the international scale, but first of all in Germany, a revolutionary and ‘scientific’ Communist Party which must be theoretically coherent, yet not become a sect cut off

⁵⁸⁶ Marx 1975b, 153.

⁵⁸⁷ Kant 2006, 166-67; Marx 1973, 325.

⁵⁸⁸ Löwy 2005, 136-37.

from the proletarian masses.”⁵⁸⁹ No iteration of vanguardist politics, including any idea of a vanguard that is somehow connected to the working class, can escape inconsistency with Marx’s “Scientific socialism.”⁵⁹⁰

The concept of a vanguard is not part of Marx’s idea of self-transformative “revolutionary practice.” As Engels claimed,

“Marx...entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working class, which was sure to result from combined action and mutual discussion. The very events and vicissitudes of the struggle against capital, the defeats even more than the victories, could not help bringing home to men’s minds the insufficiency of their various favourite nostrums, and preparing the way for a more complete insight into the true conditions of working-class emancipation. And Marx was right.”⁵⁹¹

Whether he was right or wrong, Marx was clear about his belief that members of the working class

“know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁹⁰ According to Marx the term “Scientific socialism” was “only used in opposition to utopian socialism, which wants to attach the people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself” (Marx 2010c, 337). This also applies to vanguard groups because as an ‘advanced layer’ they bring in “knowledge” about the “social movement” that is not “made by the people itself.”

⁵⁹¹ Marx 2010, 63. Cf. Marx’s claim that “the material and mental elements” for the “collective form” of control of the means of production “are created by the very development of capitalist society” (Marx 2010c, 376).

pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, and with the heroic resolve to act up to it.”⁵⁹²

It makes no difference if we point out, as Löwy indicates, that Marx may have had some vanguardist tendencies in a relatively early period, because his theory of “Scientific socialism”—including the budding form that it was in when he was young—is anti-vanguardist in principle. Indeed, there also appears to be evidence which suggests that Marx had some vanguardist tendencies later on as well,⁵⁹³ but what he chose to emphasize about his experience of revolutionary social movements is of greater importance for our understanding of his idea of the role of revolutionary theorists like himself and the possible role of some kind of vanguard group. Consider, for example, his account of the role of the International in the affairs of the Paris Commune:

“The insurrection in Paris was made by the workmen of Paris. The ablest of the workmen must necessarily have been its leaders and administrators; but the ablest of the workmen happen also to be members of the International Association. Yet the Association as such may be in no way responsible for their action.”⁵⁹⁴

“The Association does not dictate the form of political movements,” he claimed, “it only requires a pledge as to their end.”⁵⁹⁵ Even though Löwy claimed that Marx’s idea of the “self-liberation of the working class through communist revolution” and “self-education of the proletariat

⁵⁹² Ibid., 213. As Hal Draper put it, “against all varieties of socialism and reform which looked on the working masses in the accusative case (‘we will emancipate *them*’), Marx developed the principle of the self-emancipation of the working class” (Draper 1977, 216). Cf. Draper 1978, 42.

⁵⁹³ In 1870 he claimed that the “English have all that is needed *materially* for social revolution. What they lack is *the sense of generalization and revolutionary passion*. These are things that only the General Council can supply, and it can thus speed up the genuinely revolutionary movement in this country, and consequently *everywhere else*” (Marx 2010c, 116).

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 394.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 395.

through its own revolutionary practice”—i.e., that “in the course of its struggle against the existing state of affairs, the proletariat transforms itself, develops its consciousness, and becomes capable of building a new society”—he overemphasized the significance of Marx’s vanguardist tendencies and presented him as a vanguardist of the Leninist variety.⁵⁹⁶

If there is a single statement that best sums up Marx’s idea of the role of who he called “the theoreticians of the proletarian class,” it is his claim that as “history moves forward” and “the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines,” these theoreticians “have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece.”⁵⁹⁷ Thus in his view the theoretician’s voice has been “called forth” by the situation “from which emanates the consciousness of the necessity of a fundamental revolution, the communist consciousness.”⁵⁹⁸ It is evident that Marx was writing it as he experienced it. In his 1843 “Introduction” to his critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* he claimed that “Theory is actualized in a people only insofar as it actualizes their needs”; and in personal correspondence from the same period he wrote: “I am convinced that a real demand will be met by our plan, and it must be possible really to fulfill the real demand.”⁵⁹⁹ Marx was not opposed to the organization of a revolutionary political party⁶⁰⁰ but in his view such activity presupposes that “a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated” has developed and “finds the substance and material of its revolutionary activity in its own immediate situation: enemies to be struck down; measures to be taken, dictated by the needs of the struggle,” and he thought that “the consequences of its own

⁵⁹⁶ Lowy 2005, 106.

⁵⁹⁷ Marx and Engels 1976, 177. Cf. McCarney’s claim that for “Hegel and Marx...what is required of the dialectical thinker is not to moralise the immanent movement of reason and of reality but to surrender to it and seek to articulate it, to ‘become its mouthpiece’” (McCarney 2000, 68). Cf. McCarney 1990, 81-3.

⁵⁹⁸ Marx and Engels 1998, 60.

⁵⁹⁹ Marx 1994 35; Marx 1967, 212.

⁶⁰⁰ He claimed that “even under the most favourable political conditions all serious success of the proletariat depends upon an organization that unites and concentrates its forces” (Marx 2010c, 99).

actions drive it on.”⁶⁰¹ After all, he believed that “the working class” was “constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production.”⁶⁰²

Nevertheless, Marx maintained that the presence of vanguard sects is unavoidable in the early, immature phases of revolutionary struggle.⁶⁰³ For the sake of clarity it is worth quoting Marx at length:

“All the socialist founders of sects belong to a period in which the working classes themselves were neither sufficiently trained and organized by the march of capitalist society itself to enter as historical agents upon the world’s stage, nor were the material conditions of their emancipation sufficiently matured in the old world itself.... The utopian founders of sects...found neither in society itself the material conditions of its transformation, nor in the working class the organized power and the conscience of the movement. They tried to compensate for the historical conditions of the movement by fantastic pictures and plans of a new society in whose propaganda they saw the true means of salvation.”⁶⁰⁴ From the moment the working

⁶⁰¹ Marx 2010b, 45. He claimed that “Our party can only become the government when conditions allow *its* views to be put into practice” (Marx 2010, 343). This is consistent with Avineri’s claim that “Even during 1857-8, when he envisaged a possible radicalization that might lead to revolution, Marx did not try to prepare for it by forming or joining a revolutionary group. Quite the contrary: when he saw the gathering storm, he immersed himself with additional intensity in his economic studies, so that his Political Economy would be ready once the revolution broke out” (Avineri 1968, 257).

⁶⁰² Marx 1976, 929.

⁶⁰³ He claimed that the “first phase in the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is marked by sectarianism. This is because the proletariat has not yet reached the stage of being sufficiently developed to act as a class. Individual thinkers provide a critique of social antagonisms, and put forward fantastic solutions which the mass of workers can only accept, pass on, and put into practice” (Marx 2010c, 298).

⁶⁰⁴ Engels claimed that the “means through which the abuses [of the capitalist system] that have been revealed can be got rid of must likewise be present, in more or less developed form, in the altered conditions of production. These means are not to be *invented* by the mind, but *discovered* by means of the mind in the existing material facts of production” (Engels 1934, 294). This idea was already essentially present in the *Manifesto*: “When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created” (Marx 2010, 85).

men's class movement became real, the fantastic utopias evanesced, not because the working class had given up the end aimed at by these utopians, but because they had found the real means to realize them, and in their place came a real insight into the historic conditions of the movement and a more and more gathering force of the militant organization of the working class."⁶⁰⁵

As he claimed in a letter to Friedrich Bolte in 1871, the "development of socialist sectarianism and that of the real working-class movement always stand in inverse proportion to each other. Sects are (historically) justified so long as the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historical movement."⁶⁰⁶

This outlook is yet another indication of the significance of Hegel's influence on Marx's revolutionary theory and orientation. In the midst of a discussion on "the subject of *issuing instructions* on how the world ought to be," Hegel notoriously claimed that "philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform this function. As the *thought* of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its completed state."⁶⁰⁷ Marx not only carried out this approach in his theoretical work, he also affirmed it in his socio-political practice. For example, while he was involved with the First International Workingmen's Association he put forward "a program limited to outlining the major features of the proletarian movement" and left "the details of theory to be worked out as inspired by the demands of the practical struggle."⁶⁰⁸ Thus while the record of Marx's life-activity indicates that he was indeed a revolutionary intellectual who sought to engage with the working class

⁶⁰⁵ Marx 2010c, 262.

⁶⁰⁶ Marx 1975c, 253.

⁶⁰⁷ Hegel 1991, 23.

⁶⁰⁸ Marx 2010c, 299.

movement, his life-activity is also a prime example of the limits to interventions in social movements by revolutionary theorists. After all, his interventions in the First International Workingmen's Association (which he was invited to participate in) could not keep it from disintegrating.

Ultimately it is inconsistent to maintain that “the masses” of working people will liberate themselves but that they also need direction—on how to think and act, and therefore how to feel, will, etc.—from the superior intellects of a vanguard in order to do so. Löwy, for example, claimed that Marx thought that “the proletariat tends towards the totality through its practice of the class struggle, thanks to the role of *mediation*, which is played by its communist vanguard,” whereby the vanguard “is the *instrument* of the masses for coming to consciousness and taking revolutionary action. Its role is not to act in place or ‘above’ the working class but to *guide* the latter towards the path of its self-liberation, towards the communist ‘mass’ revolution.”⁶⁰⁹ A similar inconsistency is found in Guido Starosta's book *Marx's Capital, Method and Revolutionary Subjectivity*. As with Löwy's book, it indicates that Starosta's interpretation has missed the mark.

Starosta claims that without “a detailed positive account of the laws of motion of alienated labour and the determinations of the political action of the workers as personifications of the former, no significant guide to action can be drawn from revolutionary theory” because the “scientific critique of capital” would be “bound to remain external and thus impotent to fully unite with practice.”⁶¹⁰ This diverges considerably from Marx's position. First of all, Marx's

⁶⁰⁹ Löwy 2005, 137.

⁶¹⁰ Starosta 2016, 45. Starosta's position on this question is inconsistent because he also claims that “science as practical criticism does not need to be applied to or guide an externally conceived practice” (Ibid., 54). Cf. his ambiguous claim that “the only meaningful way in which to materialistically understand the so-called ‘unity of theory and practice’” is to recognize that “science as practical criticism” has “the aim of uncovering and *ideally*

work indicates that he was *not* concerned with *uniting* “theory” and “practice” but instead presupposed that they were *already* in unity; indeed, his work suggests that a theory of “the political action of the workers” entails that they are already engaged in the process of transcending capitalism and thus corresponds to the development of revolutionary subjectivity to the extent required for participating in the intersubjective experience that the theory reflects. Starosta even argues that “dialectical cognition must provide the necessity of the transformative action of the workers in the *totality* of its determinations,” i.e., “all the determinations involved in the different forms of political action of the workers necessary for its production as fully conscious revolutionary action.”⁶¹¹ Any such “necessity” is what Marx sought to comprehend in a clear and comprehensive way within the phenomena of the workers’ already existing “revolutionary practice.” In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels attempted to make it clear that the “theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.”⁶¹² Starosta, on the contrary, claimed that “what was at stake in [Marx’s] investigation was the conscious organization, i.e., the discovery of the social necessity, of the political action of the working class,” and that Marx attempted to provide “scientific grounds for his political position concerning the content and form of proletarian action antagonistic to capital.”⁶¹³ With the *Manifesto* Marx intended to articulately vocalize the

appropriating human practice’s *immanent* material and social determinations...in order consciously to regulate their *real* actualization through ‘revolutionary’, ‘practical-critical’ activity” (Ibid.).

⁶¹¹ Starosta 2016, 106-7. Cf. Starosta 2016, 100-109. He wrote about “the need to grasp the specific qualitative determination immanent in each of the forms of the class struggle in order to discover their necessity” (Starosta 2016, 114).

⁶¹² Marx 2010, 80.

⁶¹³ Starosta 2016, 100-1. Cf. Lenin: “We must take upon ourselves the task of organizing a universal political struggle under the leadership of *our Party* in such a manner as to obtain all the support possible...for the struggle and for our Party” (Lenin 1943, 117).

“necessity”—of the “real” needs—of the revolutionary working class movement, i.e., of the workers that were “already *conscious*” of their “historic task” and were “constantly working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity.”⁶¹⁴ Marx was contributing to the “clarity” of the worker’s consciousness of their “historic task” on the premises that the working class had been “sufficiently trained and organized by the march of capitalist society itself to enter as historical agents upon the world’s stage.” On these premises it makes sense to give a speech about what he considered “real insight into the historic conditions of the movement” because the working class *is* “the organized power and the conscience of the movement.”

From the perspective presented in Starosta’s work it is as if Marx was writing *Capital* so that those of us who cannot engage in “dialectical research” can come “to know what concrete form our action should take in order to achieve the willed transformation of the world.”⁶¹⁵ Evidence suggests, however, that in Marx’s view it is only in the wake of the development of requisite “subjective and objective conditions” engendered through our “estranged” activity and “revolutionary practice” that *we discover for ourselves* the necessity of our revolutionary action.⁶¹⁶ As Marx claimed in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, we “must first create the revolutionary starting-point, i.e., the situation, relations and conditions necessary for the modern

⁶¹⁴ Marx 1975b, 37. It is evident that Marx thought sections of the workers of the world were “already conscious.” Consider, for instance, his view of the revolt of the Silesian textile workers in 1844. He claimed that the “Silesian uprising *begins* precisely where the French and English labour revolts *end*, with the consciousness of the nature of the proletariat. The action itself bears this *superior* character. Not only the machines, the rivals of the worker, are destroyed but also *account books* and titles to property. While all other movements were directed first of all against the visible enemy, the *industrial lord*, this movement is at the same time directed against the hidden enemy, the banker. Finally, not a single English labour revolt has been conducted with equal courage, deliberation, and persistence” (Marx 1967, 352).

⁶¹⁵ Starosta 2016, 189-99. According to Starosta, “Dialectical research must...analytically apprehend all relevant social forms and synthetically reproduce the ‘inner connections’ leading to the constitution of the political action of wage-labourers as the form taken by the revolutionary transformation of the historical mode of existence of the human life-process” (Starosta 2013, 234).

⁶¹⁶ Marx 1973, 611.

revolution to become serious.”⁶¹⁷ In this work it is clear that he is invoking Hegel’s idea of “reason as the rose in the cross.”⁶¹⁸

To his credit, Starosta recognized the compulsion to “associate” in capitalism as well as the fact that Marx saw “associations as a necessary ‘training ground’ for the revolutionary struggle,” but he did not take into account that it leads to the development of “needs” (e.g. the “need for society”) and a state of character that cannot be imparted by another’s guidance, as well as the fact that “the necessity of a fundamental revolution” is connected to this “inner necessity.”⁶¹⁹ The ‘education’ required for this mental-psychological transformation cannot be developed through formal instruction but must instead be attained through “revolutionary practice.” In accordance with Marx’s Aristotelianism, the transformation of the “mental” and “practical senses” can be conceived of as coinciding with the development of a degree of both “moral virtue” and “practical wisdom.” Aristotle defined the latter as “the quality of mind concerned with things just and [beautiful] and good for man” and claimed that “we are none the more able to act for *knowing* them if the virtues are states of *character*” because “states of character arise out of like activities.”⁶²⁰ Thus even *if* Marx asked us to “Imagine that the capitalist form of society has been abolished and that society has been organized as a conscious association working according to a plan,” his prompt alone is not enough to get us to see it with our mind’s eye and desire its existence.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ Marx 2010b, 150.

⁶¹⁸ He claimed that the working classes “shrink back again and again before the indeterminate immensity of their own goals, until the situation is created in which any retreat is impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!* Here is the rose, dance here!” (Ibid., 150).

⁶¹⁹ Starosta 2016, 111.

⁶²⁰ Aristotle 1998, 154, 29.

⁶²¹ Marx 1976, 799.

It comes as no surprise when, at the end of Starosta's book, we are told that it is the task of "communist intellectual labourers" to provide the "form of political action that could mediate the immediate needs of the workers with the 'historical interests of the proletariat as a whole.'"⁶²² In Starosta's view, revolutionary subjects are in need of a perspective beyond theirs "in order to account for the necessity of the practical abolition of alienated life"—instead of being able to think, feel, will and act in a way that is necessary for *self-emancipation*.⁶²³ Evidence suggests that this is an act that Marx had come across. He claimed, for instance, that the

"only task of a thoughtful and truth-loving mind in regard to the first outbreak of the Silesian labour revolt was not to play the role of *schoolmaster* to the event but rather to study its *peculiar* character. For the latter some scientific insight and love of humanity is necessary, while for the other operation a glib phraseology, soaked in hollow egoism, is quite sufficient."⁶²⁴

Rather than attempting to "hurl revolutionary thunderbolts," Marx was occupied with "soberly analyzing the state of affairs" for those who are able to recognize them as such.⁶²⁵ In this way he acted as a mouthpiece for a clarified and unified voice of the revolutionary working class. Thus

⁶²² Starosta 2016, 315-16.

⁶²³ Ibid., 196.

⁶²⁴ Marx 1967, 353-4.

⁶²⁵ Marx 1975c, 183. Compare this approach to the view espoused by Lenin in the following passage: "Why is it that the Russian workers as yet display so little revolutionary activity in connection with the brutal way in which the police maltreat the people, in connection with the persecution of the most innocent cultural enterprises, etc.?... We must blame ourselves, our remoteness from the mass movement; we must blame ourselves for being unable as yet to organize a sufficiently wide, striking and rapid exposure of these despicable outrages. When we do that (and we must and can do it), the most backward worker will understand, *or will feel*, that the students and religious sects, the muzhiks and the authors are being abused and outraged by the very same dark forces that are oppressing and crushing him at every step of his life, and, feeling that, he himself will be filled with an irresistible desire to respond to these things and then he will organize cat-calls against the censors one day, another day he will demonstrate outside the house of the provincial governor who has brutally suppressed a peasant uprising, another day he will teach a lesson to the gendarmes in surplices who are doing the work of the Holy Inquisition, etc. As yet we have done very little, almost nothing, to *hurl* universal and fresh exposures among the masses of the workers" (Lenin 1943, 105-6).

rather than simply offering dictates for action, the way he practiced revolutionary theory contributes to our “combined action and mutual discussion” through which we attain a kind of ‘reconciliation with the world’. As he adamantly maintained,

“we do not face the world in a doctrinaire fashion with a new principle, declaring, ‘Here is truth, kneel here!’ We develop new principles for the world out of the principles of the world. We do not tell the world, ‘Cease your struggles, they are stupid; we want to give you the true watchword of the struggle.’ We merely show the world why it actually struggles; and the awareness of this is something the world *must* acquire even if it does not want to.”⁶²⁶

This passage is an indication of Marx’s confidence that the subjectivity of the working class was undergoing a process of revolutionary maturation through the experience of their fundamental life-activity (whereby we come to the revolutionary “awareness” of why we “actually” struggle). Rather than suggesting that revolutionary theorists are responsible for reforming the consciousnesses of others, Marx claimed that “awareness...is something the world *must* acquire even if it does not want to” because it is required to be free, and the context in which it was uttered implies that he thought there is a tendency to resist what he considered a “reform of consciousness.”

6. A Crisis for ‘Marxism’

The unfolding complexity of the situation of global capitalism in the course of history since Marx was active, including our encounters with considerable counter-revolutionary

⁶²⁶ Marx 1967, 214.

tendencies during this time,⁶²⁷ compels us to entertain “the question of what could justify a rational confidence in the proletariat as the historical subject which brings to an end the era of capitalism” (to borrow McCarney’s words from relatively early in the neoliberal era).⁶²⁸

McCarney responded to this question by claiming that “no greater theoretical contribution to the dialectic of human freedom could be conceived” than a “systematic study of ‘the world market and crisis’ which [Marx] projected.”⁶²⁹ Hope for a crisis of capitalism that will compel the working class to participate in revolutionary struggle is common among ‘Marxists’. However, even though Marx thought the crises of capitalism could act as potential galvanising moments (he also proposed the theory of the ‘falling rate of profit’ and predicted ever expanding and volatile capitalist crises), in his view the most decisive factor was the development of a group of revolutionary subjects who act as agents of this process. Consider, for instance, the emphasis he placed on this in a discussion about the civil war in France in which he claimed that the “Paris proletariat was still incapable, except in its *imagination*, in its *fantasy*, of moving beyond the bourgeois republic; when it came to action it invariably acted in the service of the republic.”⁶³⁰ The issue—apart from the consideration of whether revolutionary subjectivity is actually developing—is that Marx’s idea of the development of revolutionary subjectivity within the ranks of the working class is inconsistent (even if it is just incomplete and undertheorized).

While it might be true that elements of the “estranged” labour process in capitalism facilitate the revolutionary development of individuals engaged in it, he also indicated detrimental consequences that undermine his idea of this developmental process. In his view the

⁶²⁷ As with Fascism in the 20th century and the contemporary rise of the extreme Right worldwide in the decade scarred by the fallout of the global economic crisis—the ‘Great Recession’—of 2008, for instance.

⁶²⁸ McCarney 1990, 143.

⁶²⁹ McCarney 2000, 75.

⁶³⁰ Marx 2010b, 57.

“estrangement” experienced by working people stunts our development as “human” beings because capital “usurps the time for growth, development and healthy maintenance of the body,” and “squanders human beings, living labour, more readily than does any other mode of production, squandering not only flesh and blood, but nerves and brain as well.”⁶³¹ It thus ruins our *mind*, resulting in “ignorance,” “mental degradation,” “stupidity,” and “cretinism.”⁶³² This is a profound problem inherent in Marx’s idea of revolutionary subjectivity. Consider, for example, his claim that the “advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance.”⁶³³ Historical evidence can be compiled to suggest that capitalism has performed quite well in this respect, even in the face of deep social and political crises, when “estrangement” has peaked.

A conspicuous impediment to “revolutionary practice” is the fact that capitalism profoundly exhausts the physical and mental energies of the working class.⁶³⁴ Marx described this as the “physical and mental degradation” brought on by “the torture of overwork.”⁶³⁵ This is a key reason why he supported “the *limitation of the working day*” which he considered a “preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation

⁶³¹ Marx 1976, 367; Marx 1981, 182; Marx 1976, 481. Capitalist manufacturing in particular “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity” and “mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself” (Marx 1976, 482). Cf. *Ibid.*, 799.

⁶³² As Avineri points out, “Marx’s sceptical view of the proletariat’s ability to conceive its own goals and realize them without outside intellectual help has often been documented” (Avineri 1968, 63). He quotes Marx’s claim that “Asses more stupid than these German workers do not exist” (*Ibid.*).

⁶³³ Marx 1976, 899.

⁶³⁴ Marx 1964, 110-11; Marx 1976, 376, 381, 481-2, 799.

⁶³⁵ Marx 1976, 381. In capitalism “the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide” with “degradation of the labourer, and a most straitened exhaustion of his vital powers” (Marx 1973, 750).

must prove abortive,” because it “is needed to restore the health and physical energies of the working class...as well as to secure them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action.”⁶³⁶

In Marx’s view, continued struggle can lead to gradual development over a span of generations as the brutality of capitalism is resisted and conditions improve so that individuals are able to experience development even within “estrangement,” but his work also points out that the inherently hostile relations at the heart of our social life-activity in capitalism stunts the development of our ethical character and impairs the initiation of the revolutionary reorganization of society on a radically democratic basis within which we will have the opportunity for “universal” development.⁶³⁷ Indeed, Marxists today have a history of social and economic crises to reflect on which bear this out. The experiences of the four decades following the First World War can be taken as evidence that “estrangement” is profoundly detrimental for revolutionary progress even though it gives rise to revolutionary tendencies. Various kinds of revolutionary forces arise in periods of social and economic crisis, but so do reactionary ones which are at times so extreme that they reflect the symptoms of a mass psychosis.

Ultimately, Marx failed to elaborate a consistent and realistic vision of how revolutionary ethical character is developing within the “estranged” social relations of capitalist society.⁶³⁸ In

⁶³⁶ Marx 2010c, 87. Marx claimed that “After a thirty years’ struggle, fought with most admirable perseverance, the English working classes, improving a momentaneous split between the landlords and money-lords, succeeded in carrying in the Ten Hours Bill” which led to “immense physical, moral, and intellectual benefits” for the “factory operatives” (Marx 2010c, 78). In *Capital* he sarcastically remarked: “Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilment of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of [our] body and [our] mind...what foolishness!” (Marx 1976, 375).

⁶³⁷ “In too many cases,” Marx claimed, a working person “is even too ignorant to understand the true interest of [their] child, or the normal conditions of human development. However, the more enlightened part of the working class fully understands that the future of its class, and, therefore, of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation” (Marx 2010c, 89).

⁶³⁸ Skillen insightfully articulated the development of revolutionary character but underemphasized the significance of the “internal enemies” of revolutionary activity: “it is the case that direct and habitual experience,

his view we are habituated into an individualistic and possessive hostility as individuals who are united through the cash-nexus and exchange relation (on the foundation of private property)—a relation which is fundamental for life-activity in capitalism and increasingly permeates all facets of human life. Marx described this ἔθoς of our “estrangement” as “mutual pillaging”:

“Its background is the intent to pillage, to defraud. Since our exchange is selfish on your side as well as mine and since every self-interest attempts to surpass that of another person, we necessarily attempt to defraud each other.... I regard you as a means and instrument for the production of this object, that is, my goal....

Our *mutual* value is the *value* of our mutual objects for us.... [Humanity itself], therefore, is mutually *valueless* for us.”⁶³⁹

On Marx’s premises this “estrangement” is also instrumental for the development of revolutionary subjectivity.

The inconsistency inherent in Marx’s theory of revolutionary subjectivity happens to be consistent with the persistence of “estrangement” among the working class. While it might be premature to simply maintain that it cannot be overcome, there are relentless counter-revolutionary tendencies that need to be taken into account nonetheless. Indeed, the working class continues to fight itself and historical evidence indicates that it is not immune to waves of extreme reaction. In times of struggle it is not uncommon to see the acceleration of the zero-sum-

not only of reciprocities, of taken-for-granted ‘mutual aid,’ but also of *common* suffering and *common* joy where community enters into the nature of the passions, fosters a capacity directly to appreciate and respond to situations ‘disinterestedly,’ as ‘one of many.’ In this sense, ‘the universal class’ received its epithet from Marx in part because he thought that ‘the brotherhood of man’ could be ‘a fact of life’ to its members; because the proletariat, the producers, protected by separation from ownership from bourgeois values, is the bearer in a qualitative, though not *unqualified* way, of universal human values. These values had their internal enemies—opposed by situationally generated tendencies to possess, to submit, to escape, to ‘scab’” (Skillen 1981, 166).

⁶³⁹ Marx 1994, 51-2.

gain ethos and envious competition instead of “the brotherhood of man.” We fight to ‘get ahead’ as individuals pitted against each other in the war of all against all—instead of becoming aware of our common struggle and collective power, recognizing that the freedom of others is a condition of our own, and working together to liberate ourselves from hardship and oppression. It could be that Marx overestimated the pace at which working class solidarity was growing (or the extent to which it can grow at all) and, in particular, the tendency for all forms of divisive prejudice to progressively diminish. Whatever the case may be, his writing indicates that he had considerable experience with the reactionary tendencies of working people. Consider, for instance, this statement of his on the situation in England in 1870:

“All English industrial and commercial centers now possess a working class *split* into two *hostile* camps: English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker because he sees in him a competitor who lowers his standard of life. Compared with the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling nation* and for this very reason he makes himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland* and thus strengthens their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude is much the same as that of the ‘poor whites’ towards the ‘niggers’ in the former slave states of the American Union. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of *English rule in Ireland*.

“This antagonism is artificially sustained and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the *secret of the impotence of the English working class*, despite its

organization. It is the secret which enables the capitalist class to maintain its power, as this class is perfectly aware.”⁶⁴⁰

Aside from consideration of the actual development of revolutionary subjectivity in the world, the problem with Marx’s view of this process is an existential crisis for ‘Marxism’. On Marx’s premises, any attempt to reformulate ‘Marxism’ to save it from this crisis is mistaken. For those who seek to involve themselves in the struggle for human emancipation through the practice of social and political theory on similar premises, a foray into the mental-psychological dimension of human life-activity—a frontier not beyond the bounds of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ but one which he did not sufficiently explore in his writing—is integral for comprehending the root of our social and political struggles.

“And meanwhile we spawn senses and sensations, drown in delusions

And the river, sated with blood and mud and bile

We suck it up bursting in air, we suck it like blood from a puncture by a rust-eaten needle

We walk crippled, our feet leaden, bound by ropes of greed, the cable of defective

*pleasure and desire to succeed....”*⁶⁴¹

⁶⁴⁰ Marx 2010c, 169.

⁶⁴¹ Efthymiades 2016, 27.

Conclusion

“Death and Love are myths of the negative dialectic because the dialectic is the simple inner light, the penetrating eye of Love, the inner soul which is not crushed through the material dissolution of life. It is the inner place of the spirit. Thus Love is the myth of the dialectic. But the dialectic is also the torrent which shatters multiplicity and its limits, which overthrows autonomous forms to plunge everything into the one sea of eternity. Hence the myth of the dialectic is Death.

The dialectic is thus Death but at the same time the vehicle of what is living, the flowering in the garden of spirit. It is the effervescing in the bubbling tumbler of innumerable suns from which the flower of a spiritual fire blooms.”

- Marx⁶⁴²

1. The Paradox of “Estrangement” and the Human “Soul” through the Prism of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’, Freud’s Psychoanalytic Psychology, and Husserl’s

Phenomenology

There is substantial textual evidence which indicates that Marx thought “estrangement” has a fundamental mental component and that it is also related to the struggles arising from the social satisfaction of bio-physical/natural-animal needs determined via a process of natural evolution and further modified historically. He depicted the “soul” as an integral factor in the determination of our life-activity, including in the context of the idea that at certain stages of development our “species powers” become independent of us. This psychological dimension is evident, for instance, in his claim that “the workers find themselves confronted by” the “capital

⁶⁴² Marx 1967, 60.

that lives in the capitalist,” and it fits with his claim that the alien power which dominates us in conditions of “estrangement” is ultimately ourselves, both as individuals and collectively as a species.⁶⁴³

Ultimately, Marx portrayed “estrangement” as an expression of the human “mind” in the process of its development, as well as a feature of socio-material practice and relations. His writing displays the paradox that throughout the process of “estrangement” our consciousness can be characterized in part as illusory (or “mystical”) even though it arises from the ‘real world’ of life-activity. Consider, for instance, his claim that the “transposition of the social productivity of labour into the material attributes of capital is so firmly entrenched in people’s minds that the advantages of machinery, the use of science, invention, etc. are *necessarily* conceived in this *alienated* form, so that all these things are deemed to be the *attributes of capital*.”⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, he thought that a fundamental aspect of the “basis for this” is “the form in which objects appear in the framework of capitalist production and hence in the minds of those caught up in that mode of production.”⁶⁴⁵ He emphasized that consciousness is “practical”⁶⁴⁶ but he also focused on “estranged” consciousness *as an experience* because it is within consciousness that the world appears to us, whether ‘real’ or ‘illusory’. If consciousness “can never be anything else except conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process,” the experience of

⁶⁴³ Marx 1976, 1054.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., 1058.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶ “The phantoms formed in the human brain...are necessary sublimations of man’s material life-process which is empirically verifiable and connected with material premises.... Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness” (Marx 1967, 415).

“estrangement” is an irrational experience of our “actual life-process” (which itself is carried out in a more or less “rational” way).⁶⁴⁷

Starting out “from any form of theoretical and practical consciousness”—i.e., taking “the forms peculiar to existing reality” as his “point of departure”—Marx treated the experience of the “mystical consciousness” of “estrangement” phenomenologically in a manner akin to Husserl’s phenomenology. In the process he concerned himself with an embryonic form of what Husserl elaborated as “intentionality.”⁶⁴⁸ This indicates that the incipient psychology in Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ has an affinity to Husserl’s “phenomenological psychology.”⁶⁴⁹ For Husserl, however, this psychology “simply knows nothing other than the subjective,”⁶⁵⁰ whereas Marx’s concentration on social life-activity is what foremost shaped the various nebulous expressions of his incipient psychological theory. The fact that human beings are part of a natural “life process” is a cornerstone of ‘Historical Materialism’.⁶⁵¹ “Life” is an onto-cosmological principle for Marx and as such it is ultimately affirmed in everything that exists,

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 414. Consider, for instance, his claim that the “irrational forms in which certain economic relationships appear and are grasped in practice do not bother the practical bearers of these relationships in their everyday dealings; since they are accustomed to operating within these forms, it does not strike them as anything worth thinking about. A complete contradiction holds nothing at all mysterious for them. In forms of appearance that are estranged from their inner connection and, taken in isolation, are absurd, they feel as much at home as a fish in water” (Marx 1976, 914).

⁶⁴⁸ Cf. Husserl’s claim that “when we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved but not on the psychical experience as such, in which these things are known *as such*. Only reflection reveals this to us. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight out—the values, goals, and instrumentalities—we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become ‘conscious’ of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they ‘appear’. For this reason, they are called ‘phenomena’, and their most general essential character is to exist as the ‘consciousness-of’ or ‘appearance-of’ the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes, and so forth” (Husserl 1999, 323).

⁶⁴⁹ Husserl claimed that if the “realm of what we call ‘phenomena’ proves to be the possible field for a pure psychological discipline related exclusively to phenomena, we can understand the designation of it as *phenomenological psychology*” (Ibid.).

⁶⁵⁰ Cf. his idea of a “scientifically rigorous form of a psychology purely of inner experience” in his article “Phenomenological Psychology and Transcendental Phenomenology” (Husserl 1999, 328).

⁶⁵¹ After all, he thought that “the process” of “material production” is “the life process in the realm of the social” (Marx 1976, 990).

even that which we would normally consider ‘dead’.⁶⁵² This entails that even so-called ‘inorganic matter’ is an *active* moment in the pulsing process of effervescent “life,” the creative force animating the interconnected totality of all being. “Reason” may ‘govern the world’ but the force of Eros,⁶⁵³ as it were, also has a hand in the cosmos. This kind of thinking is reflected in Marx’s outline of the premises of ‘Historical Materialism’ in which he attempts to theorize our emergence from the “life process” in the ‘natural world’.

Insofar as ‘Historical Materialism’ presupposes our “initial animal condition,” revolutionary subjectivity is the penultimate result of a struggle not only with external nature but with our own bestial nature originating in the instinctual life of natural-animal existence.⁶⁵⁴ “Immediately,” Marx claimed, humanity “is a *natural being*. As a living natural being [we are], in one aspect, endowed with the *natural capacities* and *vital powers* of an *active* natural being. These capacities exist in [us] as tendencies and capabilities, as *drives*.”⁶⁵⁵ Thus even though we have developed subjective-mental life above our initial animal nature and have lived in ‘civilizations’ for millennia, the ‘state of nature’ is not simply a thing of the past because we are still partly animals with bodies that are driven in part by bio-physical forces (which transform throughout the socio-historical movement of our existence).⁶⁵⁶ Marx’s depiction of this aspect of the complex “inner world” of the human being indicates that he understood it as an element of

⁶⁵² He claimed, for instance, that “in history, as in nature, putrefaction is the laboratory of life” (Marx 1965, 995).

⁶⁵³ “We have to ask,” Whitehead mused, “whether nature does not contain within itself a tendency to be in tune, an Eros urging towards perfection” (Whitehead 1967, 251).

⁶⁵⁴ Marx 1976, 647.

⁶⁵⁵ Marx 1967, 325.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. Fromm’s claim that the “realm of human drives is a natural force which, like other natural forces...is an immediate part of the substructure of the social process. Knowledge of this force, then, is necessary for a complete understanding of the social process” (Fromm 1970, 157).

the “soul,” which together with our higher mental faculties is the subjective basis of the “perceptibly existing psychology” in our life-activity.

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory complements Marx’s perspective on the historical transformation of our “natural” needs and desires through life-activity which involves the unavoidably social satisfaction of “natural necessity.” Freud thought that “civilization is to a large extent being constantly created anew” because “each individual who makes a fresh entry into human society repeats” the “sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefit of the whole community.”⁶⁵⁷ He described this process as “frustration by reality” under “the pressure of vital needs—Necessity,”⁶⁵⁸ and the role it plays in his theory of the human psyche is a major point of intersection with the foundational premises of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’. It is worth quoting Marx’s most concise articulation of these premises at length:

“[The] first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history...[is that] life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy

⁶⁵⁷ Freud 1966b, 27. According to Hegel, “constraint put upon impulse, desire” and the “mere brute emotions and rude instincts,” as well as the “limitation” of “premeditated self-will of caprice and passion,” is “the indispensable proviso of emancipation” because the “state of Nature” is “predominantly that of injustice and violence, of untamed natural impulses, of inhuman deeds and feelings” (Hegel 1956, 41). Cf. Freud’s claim that for “incalculable ages mankind has been passing through a process of evolution of culture. (Some people, I know, prefer to use the term ‘civilization’.) We owe to that process the best of what we have become, as well as a good part of what we suffer from.... The process is perhaps comparable to the domestication of certain species of animals and it is undoubtedly accompanied by physical alterations; but we are still unfamiliar with the notion that the evolution of civilization is an organic process of this kind. The psychical modifications that go along with the process of civilization are striking and unambiguous. They consist in a progressive displacement of instinctual aims and a restriction of instinctual impulses. Sensations which were pleasurable to our ancestors have become indifferent or even intolerable to ourselves; there are organic grounds for the changes in our ethical and aesthetic ideals. Of the psychological characteristics of civilization two appear to be the most important: a strengthening of the intellect, which is beginning to govern instinctual life, and an internalization of the aggressive impulses, with all its consequent advantages and perils” (Freud n.d.). On Hegel’s premises, of course, this is not the ultimate result of the ‘strengthening of the intellect’.

⁶⁵⁸ Freud 1966b, 441 (cf. 386, 442-444, 463). According to Freud “it is a characteristic feature of the libido that it struggles against submitting to the reality of the universe—to Ananke” (Ibid., 534).

these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life....

The second point is that the satisfaction of the first need (the action of satisfying, and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired) leads to new needs; and this production of new needs is the first historical act....

The third circumstance which, from the very outset, enters into historical development, is that men, who daily remake their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family....

These three aspects of social activity are...to be taken as...three aspects...which have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and which still assert themselves in history today.

The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship.”⁶⁵⁹

In an analogous way, Freud thought that the “motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one,” and “since [society] does not possess enough provisions to keep its members alive unless they work, it must restrict the number of its members and divert their energies from sexual activity to work. It is faced, in short, by the eternal, *primaeval* exigencies of life, which are with us to this day.”⁶⁶⁰ In Marx's work the social process of production and reproduction of

⁶⁵⁹ Marx and Engels 1998, 47-49.

⁶⁶⁰ Freud 1966b, 386.

life is a primary nexus of “estrangement” because the struggle to procure the requirements of life gives rise to “the need, the necessity,” of “associating with the individuals around” us.⁶⁶¹ He does not get into elaborate detail about this feature of “estrangement” but the intersubjective nature of our struggles to satisfy “natural necessity” is depicted in his writing as having a stimulating effect on the development of our conscious “mind.” Even though he focused primarily on the class struggle and the labour process in the sphere of ‘civil society’, he thought a primary form of human production and reproduction takes place in the “family” in relations between “parents and children.” This suggests that it is also primary for “estrangement” which thus begins in the infancy of the human species and as individuals, along with the rest of our development.⁶⁶²

From the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, the socio-historical alteration of our natural “drives”—as an “*active* natural being”—entails that our instincts have become sublimated or repressed but still operative in our unconscious and redirected.⁶⁶³ To put Freud’s view briefly, if the struggle to satisfy the portion of “natural necessity” *in us*—which is connected to the bestial-instinctual part of our psyche—becomes overwhelming, it leads to their repression and establishment in our “unconscious” with the consequence that our behaviour is later influenced by these reoriented drives (the source of which is obscured by the fundamental structure and functioning of the psyche itself). Freud maintained that what psychoanalysis “aims at and

⁶⁶¹ Marx and Engels 1998, 50, 49.

⁶⁶² Recall Marx’s statement—quoted in the previous chapter—that “the future” of humanity “altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation.” Cf. Aristotle’s claim that “states of character arise out of like activities.... It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference” (Aristotle 1998, 29).

⁶⁶³ “We believe,” Freud wrote, that “civilization has been created under pressure of the exigencies of life at the cost of satisfaction of the instincts,” e.g., “the sexual impulses” which “are diverted from their sexual aims and directed to others that are socially higher and no longer sexual” (Freud 1966b, 26-27). Compare Hegel’s claim that as “the passions of men are gratified” they “develop themselves and their aims in accordance with their natural tendencies, and build up the edifice of human society; thus fortifying a position for Right and Order *against themselves*” (Hegel 1956, 27). For Freud, however, this ultimately leads to “discontent” which is inconsistent with the actualization of what Hegel understood as freedom.

achieves is nothing other than the uncovering of what is unconscious in mental life,” and thus freedom requires that we become conscious of the mysterious, alien power of our “unconscious.”⁶⁶⁴ The role of the “unconscious” in Freud’s conception of psychical life is comparable with Marx’s idea of “estrangement,” specifically in relation to the notion that our own activity is “alienated” and driven from an unintelligible source which is, at least in part, *in us*; and which, in some circumstances, is an unavoidable and necessary phase in our species’ development.⁶⁶⁵ To reiterate a previous point: Marx’s work indicates that he thought it is not just our social activity *per se* which obfuscates and distorts the experience of our activity; he also understood it as a product of human subjectivity itself. Of course, Marx did not conceive of an idea like Freud’s “unconscious,” but the record of his thought about our “*drives*” as a “living,” “*active natural being*”—which are a kind of *internal* “natural necessity”⁶⁶⁶—are amenable to linking with Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (bearing in mind the difference in philosophical premises).⁶⁶⁷ This comparison is possible whether Freud’s idea of the psyche and its structure, including his idea of the “unconscious,” is entirely correct or not.

⁶⁶⁴ Freud 1966b, 482-3. In Freud’s view it “is only the analysis of one of the affections which we call narcissistic psychoneuroses that promises to furnish us with conceptions through which the enigmatic *Ucs.* [unconscious] will be...made tangible” (Freud 1991, 201). Consider, for instance, an interpretation of Marx’s idea of the capitalist “passions” from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis. Even though it is one possible interpretation of this phenomenon articulated by Marx, the congruency with Freud’s thought is noteworthy. A psychoanalytic perspective would treat them as forms of “neurotic” desire that act as compensation for the inhibition of direct instinctual satisfaction. According to Freud, the “psycho-analytic investigation of the psychoneuroses has taught us that their symptoms are to be traced back to directly sexual impulsions which are repressed but still remain active” (Freud 1959, 95). From this perspective the capitalist “passions” are aspects of the ‘anal character’, i.e., the particular psychosocial canalization of “anal-sadistic” impulses (he lists three primary personality traits of the ‘anal’ character: excessive orderliness, obstinacy, and parsimoniousness). From this perspective, Marx’s idea of the “mystical consciousness” of “estranged” life-activity can be framed as an unavoidable symptom of our process of development.

⁶⁶⁵ This comparison illustrates a connection between instinctual activity and the exercise and development of human powers which was left unexplored by Marx.

⁶⁶⁶ Cf. Plato’s classic treatment of “inner natural necessity” in his *Republic* (Plato 1997, 137).

⁶⁶⁷ Marx 1967, 325.

From the perspective of ‘Historical Materialism’, “self-conscious reason” develops through the process of “estrangement” whereby the natural world (including ourselves as a “natural being”) is altered by our activity. Freud’s perspective of the socio-economic frustration of instinctual desire entails a psychological process whereby the “ego-instincts” work “towards obtaining pleasure” and “under the influence of the instructress Necessity” the “ego discovers that it is inevitable for it to renounce immediate satisfaction”; and he claimed that through this experience the ego is “educated” and “has become ‘reasonable.’”⁶⁶⁸ However, Freud’s idea of “reason” is inconsistent with Marx’s because, for Freud, the operation of the inexorable “pleasure principle” within our psyche will perpetually come into conflict with the demands of reality, including other people that inhabit the world with us, insofar as our “id” perpetually strives for immediate instinctual gratification.⁶⁶⁹ Thus he maintained that human beings “have always found it hard to renounce pleasure” and “have contrived to alternate between remaining an animal of pleasure and being once more a creature of reason.”⁶⁷⁰

In this respect Freud’s work parallels the writings of Kant, for whom a truly just society remains ultimately unattainable. In Kant’s view, freedom cannot be achieved because the crudity of our instinctual-bestial nature clings so strongly that we need a master to discipline us and educate us for the demands of a peaceful and free social order, but this master can only come from among humanity itself.⁶⁷¹ As we have seen, the problem of needing an educator to educate

⁶⁶⁸ Freud 1966b, 444. This idea of “pleasure postponed” is comparable with Hegel’s depiction of the psychological process of deferred desire in the section on the “Independence and dependence of self-consciousness” in the *Phenomenology* (Ibid.).

⁶⁶⁹ As Brown claimed, for Freud the “pleasure-principle is in conflict with the reality principle, and this conflict is the cause of repression. Under the conditions of repression the essence of our being lies in the unconscious, and only in the unconscious does the pleasure-principle reign supreme” (Brown 1959, 8).

⁶⁷⁰ Freud 1966b, 463.

⁶⁷¹ This kind of problem is reflected by the case of the *judge* from Oklahoma who was found to be masturbating with a penis-pump under the bench in court while presiding over trials. He was sentenced to four years in prison in 2006 (Associated Press 2006).

the educator is an insoluble one. It is evident that the same kind of problem arises in psychoanalytic theory if it is maintained that we need an analyst to overcome the discontent of civilized life. Psychoanalysis is thus bound by a contradiction like the vanguardist fallacy which is common to 'Marxism'. This is particularly evident in the thought of the psychoanalytic-Marxist Wilhelm Reich whose work is bound by both of these fallacies. If psychoanalysis is the solution to the neurotic discontent rooted in the crudity of our instinctual nature which acts as a barrier to "integral development" and expresses itself as a constant check on the progress of human civilization, it follows that the analyst must also be analyzed, but we would still have to account for how the first analyst was capable of 'spontaneous' self-analysis. After all, Sigmund Freud analyzed Sigmund Freud, and yet given the barriers to such insight that he himself pointed out it seems that self-analysis is inadequate in principle. Ultimately, from this perspective our history is, and can only be, a record of perpetual striving for unattainable freedom, characterized predominantly by suffering and unhappiness. Marcuse's work serves as a classic example of an attempt to resolve this problem on its own foundations. In *Eros and Civilization* he railed against the "the tyranny of reason" and tried to "extrapolate the hypothesis of a non-repressive civilization from Freud's theory of the instincts" which—on the premises of Freud's psychoanalytic theory—is ultimately impossible.⁶⁷² As a result of his search for "mental forces" which "remain essentially free from the reality principle," he ended up positing the imaginative power of "phantasy" as the path to liberation because he thought that it "has a truth value of its own," and only with it lies the possible "surmounting of the antagonistic human reality" and "the liberation of sensuousness from the repressive domain of reason."⁶⁷³ In his *Essay on Liberation* he attempted to describe a "new sensibility" in which the "sensuous power of the imagination"

⁶⁷² Marcuse 1962, 164, 122.

⁶⁷³ Ibid., 130, 126, 164.

would “fashion [our] reason,” and he thought that “the freedom of the imagination is restrained not only by the sensibility, but also, at the other pole of the organic structure, by the rational faculty of man, his reason.”⁶⁷⁴ He left it up to the “imagination” to mediate “between the rational faculties and the sensuous needs.”⁶⁷⁵

Freud’s theory ultimately stands in contrast to the idea, found in Marx’s writing, that it is possible for us to develop the ability to desire in accordance with “universal” ethical values, i.e., in a conscious, “ratiocinative” way. This limitation of Freudian psychology can be illustrated with Fromm’s uncritical appropriation of what he considers the key conception of psychoanalysis: the adaptation of the instinctual structure to “social reality” and “real needs in life.”⁶⁷⁶ Any such ‘social psychology’ could not adequately incorporate the manifestation of “mind” as “self-conscious reason” on the premises of Freudian anthropology. From Marx’s perspective, the character of social relations in “communist society” is not merely derived from the sublimation of the desire “to bring one’s own genitals into contact with those of someone” else.⁶⁷⁷ Its full actualization is found in “universally developed individuals” who are able to experience and actualize aesthetic, intellectual and ethical values as “universal existences” through “rational” thought and feeling.

Alongside these divergences from Marx’s philosophical premises is the deeper inconsistency of ontological principles associated with the ‘materialism’ of the natural sciences on which Freud’s work is based (as discussed in the Introduction). In contrast, the vision of the “soul” that Husserl put forth is aligned with Marx’s premises and he spoke directly to the issues

⁶⁷⁴ Marcuse 1969, 30, 21, 29.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁷⁶ Fromm 1970, 150, 139. Fromm maintained that the “phenomena studied in social (or mass) psychology...should be understood as the result of the adaptation of the instinctual apparatus to the social reality” (Ibid., 147).

⁶⁷⁷ Freud 1969, 22.

arising from a psychological theory which shares the same ontological materialism as the natural sciences, as with psychoanalysis. According to Husserl, for “the realm of souls there is in principle no...ontology, no science corresponding to the physicalistic mathematical ideal” characteristic of the natural sciences.⁶⁷⁸ He claimed that the

“task set for modern psychology, and taken over by it, was to be a science of psychophysical realities, of men and animals⁶⁷⁹ as unitary beings, though divided into two real strata. Here all theoretical thinking moves on the ground of the taken-for-granted, pregiven world of experience, the world of natural life; and theoretical interest is simply directed as a special case to one of the real aspects of it, the souls, while the other aspect is supposed to be already known, or is yet to be known, by the exact natural sciences according to its objective, true being-in-itself.”⁶⁸⁰

The essentially physicalistic idea of the “soul” in Freud’s psychoanalytic psychology cannot account for our participation in what Marx described as the “suprasensible” realm of experience,

⁶⁷⁸ Husserl 1970, 265. Husserl claimed that “psychology began with a concept of soul which was not at all formulated in an original way but which stemmed from Cartesian dualism, a concept furnished by a prior constructive idea of a corporeal nature and of a mathematical natural science. Thus psychology was burdened in advance with the task of being a science parallel [to physics] and with the conception that the soul—its subject matter—was something real in a sense similar to corporeal nature, the subject matter of natural science” (Ibid., 212). The “psychology of Locke,” which developed with “the natural science of a Newton before it as a model,” is a classic example (Ibid., 177). Cf. Rousseau’s claim that “Nature commands all animals, and the beast obeys. Man receives the same impulsion, but he recognizes himself as being free to acquiesce or resist; and it is above all in this consciousness of his freedom that the spirituality of his soul reveals itself, for physics explains in a certain way the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas, but in the power to will, or rather to choose, and in the feeling of that power, we see pure spiritual activity, of which the laws of mechanics can explain nothing” (Rousseau 1984, 88).

⁶⁷⁹ Cf. his claim that “Animal realities are first of all, at a basic level, physical realities. As such, they belong in the closed nexus of relationships in physical nature, in Nature meant in the primary and most pregnant sense as the universal theme of a pure natural science; that is to say, an objective science of nature which in deliberate one-sidedness excludes all extra-physical predictions of reality” (Husserl 1999, 323).

⁶⁸⁰ Husserl 1970, 204.

nor the idea that the human “soul” is undergoing a teleological development whereby “self-conscious reason” manifests.⁶⁸¹

Husserl’s “phenomenological pure psychology” involves a conceptual framework which is more consistent with the incipient psychology in Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism’ than Freudian psychoanalysis is.⁶⁸² Husserl maintained that

“the psychic, considered purely in terms of its own essence, has no [physical] nature, has no conceivable in-itself in the natural sense, no spatiotemporally causal, no idealizable and mathematizable in-itself, no laws after the fashion of natural laws.”⁶⁸³

He claimed that psychology is like “natural science” insofar as it “can only draw its ‘rigor’ (‘exactness’) from the rationality of the essence.”⁶⁸⁴ In this case it is “the mind’s [*Geist*] own essence” which “refers not to a mystical ‘metaphysical’ essence but to one’s own being-in-oneself and for-oneself which...is accessible to the inquiring, reflecting ego through so-called ‘inner’ or ‘self-perception.’”⁶⁸⁵ This is related to the distinction that Husserl made between “the psychological ego (the human ego, that is, made worldly in the spatiotemporal world) and the

⁶⁸¹ Cf. Hegel’s idea of the “instinctive movement—the inherent impulse in the life of the soul—to break through the rind of mere nature, sensuousness, and that which is alien to it, and to attain to the light of consciousness, *i.e.* to itself” (Hegel 1956, 57).

⁶⁸² Husserl 1999, 326.

⁶⁸³ Husserl 1970, 222. In his view, the “soul ‘is’, of course, ‘in’ the world. But does this mean that it is in the world in the way that the physical body is and that, when men with living bodies and souls are experienced in the world as real, their reality, as well as that of their living bodies and souls, could have the same or even a similar sense to that of the mere physical bodies? Even though the human living body is counted among the physical bodies, it is still ‘living’—‘my physical body’, which I ‘move’, in and through which I ‘hold sway’, which I ‘animate’. If one fails to consider these matters—which soon become quite extensive—thoroughly, and actually without prejudice, one has not grasped at all what is of a soul’s *own essence* as such” (Ibid., 212).

⁶⁸⁴ Husserl 1999, 326. According to Husserl, a “phenomenological pure psychology is absolutely necessary as the foundation for the building up of an ‘exact’ empirical psychology, which since its modern beginnings has been sought according to the model of the exact pure sciences of physical nature. The fundamental meaning of ‘exactness’ in this natural science lies in its being founded on an a priori form-system—each part unfolded in a special theory (pure geometry, a theory of pure time, theory of motion, etc.)—for a Nature conceivable in these terms” (Ibid., 326).

⁶⁸⁵ Husserl 1970, 213.

transcendental ego.”⁶⁸⁶ There are strong parallels between Husserl’s idea of “transcendental subjectivity”⁶⁸⁷ and the thinking expressed in Marx’s fragmentary writings on human subjectivity. Consider, for example, the following passage:

“My *general* consciousness is only the *theoretical* shape of that of which the *living* shape is the *real* community, the social fabric.... The *activity* of my general consciousness, as an activity, is therefore also my *theoretical* existence as a social being. Above all we must avoid postulating ‘society’ again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual *is the social being*.... In his *consciousness of species* man confirms his real *social life* and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species consciousness and exists for itself in its generality as a thinking being. Man, much as he may therefore be a *particular* individual... is just as much the *totality*—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself; just as he exists also in the real world both as awareness and real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human manifestations of life. Thinking and being are thus certainly *distinct*, but at the same time they are in unity with each other.”⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 205. Husserl described this “duality” as our being “psychological, as human objectivities in the world, the subjects of psychic life, and at the same time transcendental, as the subjects of a transcendental, world-constituting life-process,” and he thought that we have “direct access” to “this transcendental subjectivity” through “a transcendental experience” (Husserl 1999, 330-31).

⁶⁸⁷ “Transcendental subjectivity...is none other than again ‘I myself’ and ‘we ourselves’; not, however, as found in the natural attitude of everyday or of positive science; i.e., apperceived as components of the objectively present world before us, but rather as subjects of conscious life, *in* which this world and all that is present—for ‘us’—‘makes’ itself through certain apperceptions. As [human beings], mentally as well as bodily present in the world, we are for ‘ourselves’; we are appearances standing within an extremely variegated intentional life-process, ‘our’ life, *in which* this being on hand constitutes itself ‘for us’ apperceptively, with its entire sense-content. The (apperceived) I and we on hand presuppose an (apperceiving) I and we, *for* which they are on hand, which, however, is not itself present again in the same sense” (Ibid., 329-330).

⁶⁸⁸ Marx 1964, 137-8.

According to Husserl, “each soul” stands “in community with others which are intentionally interrelated, that is, in a purely intentional, internally and essentially closed nexus, that of intersubjectivity.”⁶⁸⁹ On his premises this entails “a transcendental intersubjectivity constituting the world as ‘world for all.’”⁶⁹⁰ In this way his phenomenology is more thoroughly consistent with Marx’s claim that “the sense and minds of other [individuals can] become my own appropriation.”⁶⁹¹

Thus, unlike psychoanalytic psychology, Husserl’s approach aligns with the fundamental premises underlying Marx’s idea of “universal” experience. As he claimed,

“phenomenology recognizes...the absolute norms which are to be picked out intuitively from [the life of humanity], and also its...directedness towards disclosure of these norms and their conscious practical operation.... Or, in different words, it is a striving in the direction of the idea (lying in infinity) of a humanness which in action and throughout would live and move [be, exist] in truth and genuineness.”⁶⁹²

From the perspective of Marx’s ‘Historical Materialism,’ this kind of ‘practical activity’ involves the development of capacities required to experience “universal” ethical principles. In contrast, Freud’s view of experience is inconsistent with the idea of being able to know “universal” ethical values and actualize them in “free” relations. Even though Freud was concerned with the development of an individual whose desires are “reasonable” because they seek “to attain

⁶⁸⁹ Husserl 1970, 238. In other words, “there is a sole universal nature as a self-enclosed framework of all souls, which are united not externally but internally, namely, through the intentional interpenetration which is the communalization of their lives” (i.e., in “a pure, intentional, mutual internality”) (Ibid., 255-56).

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 184. Cf. what Hegel described as “the experience of what Spirit is,” i.e., the “absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’” (Hegel 1977, 110).

⁶⁹¹ Marx 1964, 139-40.

⁶⁹² Husserl 1999, 334-335.

pleasure” which “is assured through taking account of reality,” the only basis for determining ethical behaviour from his perspective is the character of our “superego” morality, i.e., the sense of conscience inherited from one’s elders and broader socio-cultural environment.⁶⁹³ Evaluative claims about the way we behave in our relations with others are inconsistent with this relativism. Ultimately the “superego” is not a substantial basis for self-determined ethical behaviour because it is a predominantly unconscious internal authority that influences behaviour through fear roused by a sense of guilt. This is consistent with the fact that Freud’s psychoanalytic psychology precludes the possibility for self-determination—and has no space for “universal” ethical values—at the ontological level.

2. Kleinian Psychoanalysis and the Development of “Human Need”

Melanie Klein’s revision of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory⁶⁹⁴ brought it closer to the philosophical premises of Marx’s social philosophy. In particular, her work is more compatible with the philosophical premises underlying Marx’s idea of ethical life and experience. Her elaboration of the human psyche and its development also overlaps with significant elements of Marx’s depiction of human subjectivity. Klein attempted to take account of an “ethical pattern” which she claimed is “universal.”⁶⁹⁵ A key idea of hers in this connection is the “integration” of

⁶⁹³ Freud 1966b, 444.

⁶⁹⁴ One of Klein’s major revisions to Freud’s theory is her reconceptualization of the subject’s “inner world” and her contribution to “object relations” theory. She maintained that “the processes of introjection and projection from the beginning of life lead to the institution inside ourselves of loved and hated objects, who are felt to be ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and who are interrelated with each other and with the self: that is to say, they constitute an inner world. This assembly of internalized objects becomes organized, together with the organization of the ego, and in the higher strata of the mind it becomes discernible as the super-ego. Thus, the phenomenon which was recognized by Freud...as the voices and the influence of the actual parents established in the ego is, according to my findings, a complex object-world, which is felt by the individual, in deep layers of the unconscious, to be concretely inside himself, and for which I and some of my colleagues therefore use the term ‘internalized objects’ and an ‘inner world’” (Klein 1998, 362).

⁶⁹⁵ In her view, “When the imperatives: ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (primarily the loved object), and ‘Thou shalt save from destruction’ (again the loved objects, and in the first place from the infant’s own aggression) have taken root in the mind, an ethical pattern is set up which is universal and the rudiment of all ethical systems” (Ibid., 322). Coming

the “ego.”⁶⁹⁶ The process of “integration” is essentially the coming-together of initially discordant parts of the ego and “internalized objects.”⁶⁹⁷

According to Klein, as the process of “integration” proceeds, “the adaptation to external reality” improves and there is “a fuller synthesis of unconscious processes,” i.e., “within the unconscious parts of the ego and super-ego,” whereby “the demarcation between conscious and unconscious is more distinct.”⁶⁹⁸ The “growing sense of reality”⁶⁹⁹ associated with “integration and synthesis” is a step away from Freud’s ethical relativism toward the kind of “rational” self-determination presented in Marx’s work in so far as “integration” entails the gradual “assimilation” of the “super-ego” by the ego.⁷⁰⁰ Thus from the perspective of Klein’s psychoanalytic psychology it is possible to conceive of a subject capable of engaging in relations of “justice” that are good from a “universal” standpoint.⁷⁰¹ Marx’s idea of “universally developed individuals” suggests that when we are fully developed there would be no need for

from a “socialist” perspective, Michael Rustin claimed that Klein’s psychological theory is consistent with the idea of “a universal ethic” of “essential human equality” at the basis of “a social order providing a fulfilling life for all” (Rustin 1982, 95).

⁶⁹⁶ For Klein, “elements of an integrated personality” are “emotional maturity, strength of character, [the] capacity to deal with conflicting emotions, a balance between internal life and adaptation to reality, and a successful welding into a whole of the different parts of the personality” (Klein 1997, 268). It “expresses itself in the capacity for love” and more specifically corresponds to “Understanding of other people, compassion, sympathy and tolerance” (Ibid., 191, 269). Klein maintained that in “the depths of the mind, the urge to make people happy is linked up with a strong feeling of responsibility and concern for them, which manifests itself in genuine sympathy with other people and in the ability to understand them, as they are and as they feel” (Klein 1998, 311).

⁶⁹⁷ The “integration of the ego is accomplished by the different parts of the ego...being able to come together in spite of their conflicting tendencies” (Klein 1997, 289; cf. 50).

⁶⁹⁸ Klein 1997, 86.

⁶⁹⁹ Klein claimed that “steps in integration and synthesis...result in a greater capacity of the ego to acknowledge the increasingly poignant psychic reality” (Ibid., 73).

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., 304, 73.

⁷⁰¹ In relation to Marx’s social philosophy it is noteworthy that her definition of successful individual development is articulated as a kind of mean akin to Aristotelian virtue ethics; e.g., with the development of “tolerance” (see Klein 1997, 260).

something like a “super-ego” to govern ethical behaviour because we would be self-determined in a way that is “universal,” i.e. “rational.”

From a Kleinian perspective, the experience of the ethical relationship that Marx conceived as “human”—namely, relations in which we would experience each other “as a reintegration of [our] own nature and a necessary part of [ourselves]” and would be “affirmed in [our] thought as well as [our] love”—involves, in part, developmental processes in infancy that “make possible the feeling of unity with another person,” whereby “such unity means being fully understood.”⁷⁰² Her understanding of the psychology of “love” also overlaps with Marx’s idea of the “human need” for “the *other* person as a person.” From a Kleinian perspective this is prefigured in the development of the infant’s ability to experience their mother as independent and a “person.”⁷⁰³ Another key concept related to this is her idea of “reparation”—i.e., the desire to repair loved objects (including people) that a child (in a delusional way) believes they have harmed with their destructive impulses—which she associates with the capacity to love and feel concern for others. In particular, she thought that the “drive to make reparation” is “a consequence of greater insight into psychic reality and of growing synthesis, for it shows a more realistic response to the feelings of grief, guilt and fear of loss resulting from the aggression against the loved object.”⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰² Marx 1994, 53; Klein 1997, 188. She claimed that this experience is “essential for every happy love relation or friendship” and, in the context of infant development, that “such an understanding needs no words to express it” (Ibid.). She thought that to “be genuinely considerate implies that we can put ourselves in the place of other people: we ‘identify’ ourselves with them” (Klein 1998, 311).

⁷⁰³ Marx 1964, 134. Klein claimed that the “infant’s relation to parts of his mother’s body, focusing on her breast, gradually changes into a relation to her as a person,” i.e., the mother is first experienced as an object (more or less fragmented) but with the infant’s further development she becomes recognized as an independent subject (Klein 1997, 71). As Marx claimed, “love” is what “first really teaches man to believe in the objective world outside himself, which not only makes man into an object, but even the object into a man” (Marx 1975b, 21-22).

⁷⁰⁴ Klein 1997, 14.

C. Fred Alford claimed that “reparative reason” is a “Kleinian alternative” to “what the Frankfurt School calls instrumental reason” and that “Klein’s psychoanalytic studies reveal a potential for morality that flies higher than Freud’s.”⁷⁰⁵ According to Alford, with Klein’s version of psychoanalysis we encounter the idea of “a morality based not merely upon the desire to make sacrifices, in order to make reparation for phantasied acts of aggression; it is also based upon an ability to deeply identify with others, to feel connected with their fates. Their pain becomes our pain.”⁷⁰⁶ However, Alford’s focus on “the way in which reparative reason is sensitive to the complexities and nuances of objects, rather than forcing them into rigid, prefabricated categories” is misleading because it does not adequately account for the underlying reason why the individual “seeks to repair and make amends.”⁷⁰⁷ From Klein’s perspective this “reparative” tendency requires an element of depressive guilt tied to “phantasy.” A degree of delusion thus remains at the basis of Kleinian ethics. This is a major shortcoming of her psychological theory from the standpoint of Marx’s social philosophy because she essentially precludes the possibility of the development of individuality akin to “universally developed individuals.”⁷⁰⁸ Indeed, Marx’s work suggests that such individuals would require what Klein termed “Complete and permanent integration” which she maintained is “never possible” (even though she thought that a tendency toward “integration” is inherent in the ego).⁷⁰⁹

This issue in Klein’s thought is consonant with some of the aforementioned issues arising from Freud’s original version of psychoanalytic psychology. Nevertheless, her view of the

⁷⁰⁵ Alford 1989, 22, 38-39.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 138. Alford’s focus on the Frankfurt School led to his emphasis on this attribute of “reparative reason” because, according to him, it “makes reparative reason relevant to the critique of instrumental reason” (*Ibid.*).

⁷⁰⁸ She thought that “the young child’s perception of external reality and external objects is perpetually influenced and coloured by his phantasies, and...this in some measure continues throughout life” (Klein 1997, 40).

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

mental-psychological processes underlying human development complements Marx's perspective on "estranged" socio-historical practices through which humanity transforms into "the new species."⁷¹⁰ Marx claimed that through certain social practices our collective powers and relations become transferred onto objects (e.g., capital) that then dominate us as alien and hostile entities. This process resembles Klein's concept of "projective identification" which denotes the unconscious process whereby parts of the self, e.g., an infant's own impulses like greed and aggressiveness, are projected onto other objects (and people) and experienced as though they actually belong to them.⁷¹¹ For Klein, some unconscious 'projection' is an unavoidable necessity in the development of a healthy, "integrated" mind. Marx had an analogous view of the role that "estrangement" in capitalist society plays in the process of human development. In his view, with "estranged" labour in capitalism "we find the *same* situation that we find in *religion*," i.e., "the inversion of subject into object and *vice versa*," in "the realm of the social," and he claimed that it "cannot be avoided, any more than it is possible for [humanity] to avoid the stage in which [our] spiritual energies are given a religious definition as powers independent of [ourselves]."⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ Marx 1973, 325. After all, Marx thought that a "communist" revolution concludes humanity's "prehistory" (Marx 1977, 21). Cf. Engels' claim that "the common management of production by the whole of society and the resulting new development of production require and also produce quite different people. The common management of production cannot be effected by people as they are today, each one being assigned to a single branch of production, shackled to it, exploited by it, each having developed only *one* of his abilities at the cost of all the others and knowing only *one* branch, or only a branch of a branch of the total production. Even present-day industry finds less and less use for such people. Industry carried on in common and according to plan by the whole of society presupposes moreover people of all-round development, capable of surveying the entire system of production" (Marx and Engels 1976, 353).

⁷¹¹ Klein 1997, 12. See R.D. Hinshelwood's "Projective Identification and Marx's Concept of Man" in which he argues that "Marx described an unmistakable and very concrete form of projective identification" (Hinshelwood 1983, 221).

⁷¹² Marx 1976, 990.

3. Humanity's "Dream" and a Starting Point for Reconceptualising the Mental-Psychological Dimension of Socio-Political Struggle in the "Bourgeois Epoch"

At a formative period in Marx's life he expressed the desire to contribute to the "self-understanding" of "the age concerning its struggles and wishes."⁷¹³ He described the "reform of consciousness" as the awakening of the world "out of its own dream" which is "a matter of *realising* the thoughts of the past" and "consciously" performing the "old work" of humanity.⁷¹⁴ This goal corresponds to the essential aim of psychoanalytic theory which, in its own way, is concerned with what Marx called an "analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself."⁷¹⁵ As Norman Brown put it, in "the case of the neurotic individual, the goal of psychoanalytical therapy is to free him from the burden of his past.... And the method of psychoanalytical therapy is to deepen the historical consciousness of the individual...till he awakens from his own history as from a nightmare."⁷¹⁶ From the psychoanalytic perspective, the "the past" bears on the present mentally through wishes, instinctual impulses, emotional ties, etc., that were repressed in the process of psychological development and have returned to influence us from their source in our "unconscious," as with religious life.⁷¹⁷ This idea was reanimated in the Kleinian school's idea of "unconscious phantasy." As the Kleinian Roger Money-Kyrle put it, when "phantasy" is at work there is "an undercurrent of patterns belonging to other situations than the present one. Something is being repeated from the past.... The perceptual world...is being distorted—perhaps only to a slight and barely perceptible degree—by

⁷¹³ Marx 1967, 214-5.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., 213-4. From his perspective "there is not a big blank between the past and the future" (Ibid.).

⁷¹⁵ Ibid., 213.

⁷¹⁶ Brown 1959, 19.

⁷¹⁷ Freud claimed that "the story of religious ideas includes not only wish-fulfillments but important historical recollections. The concurrent influence of past and present must give religion a truly incomparable wealth of power" (Freud 1961, 69).

unconscious phantasy, and it is the distorted picture to which” we “emotionally” react.⁷¹⁸ He claimed that when “the phantasy world” is gradually recognized as unreal,

“the belief systems expressed by it are to this extent corrected. The process is analogous to the awakening from a dream. No one is entirely awake even when he is out of bed, for everyone has moods of irrational depression, anxiety or irritation which reflect the unconscious influence of phantasy. The neurotic or psychotic is someone who lives more in an unconscious dream world than other people, the unrecognized influence of which accounts for the irrationality of his emotional behaviour. As he gradually wakes under the influence of analysis, he may have to face some sorrows which he previously evaded; but he will also discard some nightmare-like anxieties.”⁷¹⁹

While the experience of “phantasy” as represented in Klein’s version of psychoanalysis parallels Marx’s idea of “estrangement” because it is unavoidable and at times instrumental for development, the idea that psychoanalysis by an external psychoanalyst is necessary for this awakening is antithetical to Marx’s view that overcoming “estrangement” is a result of the process of “estrangement” itself. He insisted that revolutionary theorists are limited to presenting what is “actually” happening, e.g., by “bringing the religious and political problems into the self-conscious human form.”⁷²⁰ From his perspective, we are living in conditions which require “illusions” and we can dispel them only through activity which transforms both our conditions of life and ourselves simultaneously. He did not treat the “mystical consciousness” of

⁷¹⁸ Money-Kyrle 1951, 85.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

⁷²⁰ Marx 1967, 214.

“estrangement” as if it were simply a hallucinatory experience⁷²¹ and in his work he presents the same process of “estrangement” that mires us in “illusions” as also bringing about a historical development of the human “mind.”

Despite its limitations, Klein’s version of psychoanalysis presents a possible starting point for reconceptualising the mental-psychological determinations of the social and political struggles of humanity which parallel the concerns of a ‘Historical Materialist’ analysis of class struggle in the “bourgeois epoch.” Her writings offer a complementary approach to a theory of the “soul” of individuals who have revolutionary or reactionary attitudes and participate in their respective social movements. Consider, for instance, her claim that the “universal ethical pattern” is “capable of manifold variations and distortions, and even of complete reversal,” and that she mentioned “the Nazi attitude” as an example of a “reversal” of this “primary pattern.”⁷²² In her explanation for this she referred to “the early unconscious relation towards the first persons attacked or injured in phantasy.”⁷²³ At the basis of this is her “conceptual distinction between depressive anxiety, guilt and reparation on the one hand and persecutory anxiety and the defenses against it on the other.”⁷²⁴ She cited Money-Kyrle’s application of this “to attitudes towards ethics in general⁷²⁵ and towards political beliefs in particular.”⁷²⁶

⁷²¹ In capitalist society, for instance, “the worker actually treats the social character of his work, its combination with the work of others for a common goal, as a power that is alien to him” and “*really* does submit to the commands of capital,” which thus “*really*” is “an alien power” (Marx 1981, 178-9 ; Marx 1976, 989, 716).

⁷²² Klein 1997, 322.

⁷²³ Ibid. “Here the aggressor and aggression have become loved and admired objects, and the attacked objects have turned into evil and must therefore be exterminated.... The object then turns into a potential persecutor, because retaliation by the same means by which it had been harmed is feared. The injured person is, however, also identical with the loved person, who should be protected and restored. Excessive early fears tend to increase the conception of the injured object as an enemy, and if this is the outcome, hatred will prevail in the struggle against love” (Ibid.).

⁷²⁴ Klein 1997, 37.

⁷²⁵ Such as forms of “morality based on irrational anxiety” (Money-Kyrle 1952, 230).

⁷²⁶ Klein 1997, 38.

Money-Kyrle approached “the conflict of different social ideologies within one nation,” i.e., “the old conflict between socialism and individualism, radicalism and conservatism,” from a Kleinian perspective.⁷²⁷ He maintained that “our political beliefs” about “political affairs” are “often very greatly influenced by unconscious phantasies surviving from early childhood which distort our conscious inferences and deductions.”⁷²⁸ This is because our “political egos” are connected to the “super-ego” which is “a being in the world of unconscious phantasy.”⁷²⁹ Aside from the theoretical differences discussed above, the concept of the “super-ego” happens to correspond with Marx’s assertion to Ruge that in the process of a “reform of consciousness” it “is not a question of drawing a great mental dividing line between past and future”; as Freud claimed, the “super-ego” “unites in itself the influences of the present and the past.”⁷³⁰ Inspired by Freud, Klein maintained that the “super-ego derives” from “the people whom we first loved and hated” and she thought that these “phantasy-relationships” form “part of our continuous, active life of feeling and of imagination.”⁷³¹ While her idea of the “super-ego” remains essentially Freudian, her revision of Freud’s theory brings it closer to Marx’s thought because

⁷²⁷ Money-Kyrle 1944, 114.

⁷²⁸ Money-Kyrle 1952, 233. Following Ernest Jones, he claimed that our “political egos” can “remain as it were the seat of an encapsulated illness in otherwise sane and normal personalities” (Money-Kyrle 1951, 99). According to Money-Kyrle some “ideological attitudes” are “ultimately conditioned by unconscious distortions of reality and must therefore be classed as pathological” (Money-Kyrle 1944b, 168). Similar to when a “patient’s emotional behaviour is irrational,” pathological ideological attitudes and beliefs are “not justified by the situation” that an individual is “really in”; these individuals behave as if they are “in different situations” because they are “in unconscious phantasy” and “unconsciously deluded” (Money-Kyrle 1952, 228-9).

⁷²⁹ Money-Kyrle 1951, 67.

⁷³⁰ Marx 1975, 144. Freud 1969, 97. “In the establishment of the super-ego,” Freud claimed, “we have before us, as it were, an example of the way in which the present is changed into the past” (Ibid.). As Brown put it, Freud’s theory maintains that “the problem of guilt in the human species...causes the nightmare of history” (Brown 1959, 277).

⁷³¹ Klein 1997, 322-323; Klein 1998, 340. She claimed that “However far we feel removed from our original dependencies, however much satisfaction we derive from the fulfilment of our adult ethical demands, in the depths of our minds our first longings to preserve and save our loved parents, and to reconcile ourselves with them, persist. There are many ways of gaining ethical satisfaction; but whether this be through social and co-operative feelings and pursuits, or even through interests which are further removed from the external world—whenever we have the feeling of moral goodness, in our unconscious minds the primary longing for reconciliation with the original objects of our love and hatred is fulfilled” (Klein 1997, 323).

the “growing assimilation of the super-ego by the ego” entails a tendency toward growing awareness of the “universal” *present* of “rational” intersubjective life-activity and experience.

In accordance with Klein’s idea of the series of psychological “positions” that individuals pass through in the early phases of psychological development—i.e., the “paranoid-schizoid” and “depressive”⁷³²—Money-Kyrle gave a Kleinian account of the “super-ego” in his attempt to explain the forms of ‘moral character’ that are observable in ideological attitudes. He arranged these forms of “conscience” on a spectrum in which the “humanist” type is closest to the “integrated”/“rational” individual and at the other extreme is the “authoritarian” which is subdivided further into more irrational forms of “disturbed morality,” namely the “hypo-manic” and “hypo-paranoid.”⁷³³ From this perspective these different forms of ‘moral character’ correspond to an unconscious sense of “guilt” that is composed of some combination of “persecutory” and “depressive” anxiety, and they are expressed in different political ideologies and the activities associated with them.

From Money-Kyrle’s Kleinian perspective, “the Nazi attitude” is connected to a predominance of “unconscious phantasy” associated with the “paranoid-schizoid position.” According to Klein “if early schizoid mechanisms and anxieties have not been sufficiently overcome, the result may be that instead of a fluid boundary between the conscious and unconscious, a rigid barrier between them arises,” indicating that “development is disturbed.”⁷³⁴ Prominent during this phase of psychological development is a force directly related to the onto-cosmology of Freudian psychoanalysis, i.e., *death*. As Klein maintained, when “there is a very

⁷³² Each of these developmental “positions” function in accordance with the particular form of anxiety that corresponds to them, i.e., “persecutory” and “depressive” respectively, and each has corresponding defences against the anxiety, e.g., “splitting” and mania.

⁷³³ Money-Kyrle 1951, 71-72.

⁷³⁴ Klein 1997, 87.

rigid barrier [between the conscious and unconscious] produced by splitting” (i.e., of the “ego” and “internalized objects” as a defense from ‘persecutory anxiety’), the “conclusion would be that the death instinct is dominant”; and when “the persecution-anxiety for the ego is in the ascendant, a full and stable identification with another object, in the sense of looking at it and understanding it as it really is, and a full capacity for love, are not possible.”⁷³⁵

In the work of both Marx and Klein the development of the capacity to “love” is portrayed as a condition of freedom and associated with increasing “universal” awareness of the world,⁷³⁶ including other individuals and our relationships with them.⁷³⁷ Marx proposed that revolutionary subjects strive to organize society on the basis of a common plan which ensures that everyone can be properly nurtured. Such individuals stand in contrast to those who create “crude communism,” with their “greed,” “envy,” and proclivity for “possession,” as well as individuals driven by feelings of vengeance and drawn to violent and authoritarian power structures. From a Kleinian perspective the form of individuality expressed in Marx’s idea of the revolutionary subject is characteristic of the “depressive” type. There is thus a congruency with Marx’s thought which presents one possible but fitting way of articulating a “spiritual” form of “poverty” associated with the “need” for “the *other* person as a person” in a form that precedes its full development and freely realized form in relations between “universally developed individuals.” Marx’s work does not suggest that the experience of such “poverty” alone is enough for individuals to develop the ethical character required for a “communist” revolution; rather, the context in which it is written suggests that Marx thought of it as a partial catalyst for the “inner”

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 244; Klein 1998, 271.

⁷³⁶ Klein shares with Marx the broad sense of “universal” experience as that which is common to all who have attained a certain level of individual development, but on different ontological and anthropological premises.

⁷³⁷ Cf. Hegel’s idea of “spirit” as the knowledge of “oneself in love” (Hegel 2007, 78).

transformation required for “revolutionary practice” in the context of the social relations of capitalist society, akin to the role that servitude plays in the development of real self-determination in Marx’s Hegelian theory of class struggle.⁷³⁸ Kleinian theory provides a possible way of conceiving of this role because it is thought that with “the depressive type” of individual the “division between unconscious and conscious is less pronounced” and they are “much more capable of insight.”⁷³⁹

4. “Is this really a conclusion?”

This dissertation has demonstrated several theses in relation to key components of Marx’s philosophy that conventional interpretations either misrepresent or overlook entirely. Chief among them are his sublation of the ontological idea that “reason governs the world”; the “speculative”-phenomenological nature of his “dialectical method”; the development of “*universal* human nature” as “free” being, which is our “end” in the Aristotelian sense; his idea of freedom as the “rational” activities (the creation and enjoyment of “beauty” and “truth” as ends-in-themselves and the social provision of what is required for the full development and

⁷³⁸ Consider the following lines written by Yannis Ritsos during the Greek Civil War in 1948 while he was detained at a political prison camp (at these prisons Leftists were tortured in an attempt to crush the spirit of their resistance, at times having members of their family beaten and sexually abused in front of them, and forced to sign humiliating renunciations of their struggle):

November 6:

“Well then—must we really be so sad

In order to love one another?”

November 9:

“Tonight we learned that we have to be happy
in order to be loved by one another” (Ritsos 2013, 51, 19).

⁷³⁹ Klein 1997, 67. Klein claimed that the “experience of depressive feelings”—i.e., the specific kind of “suffering” associated with them—“has the effect of further integrating the ego, because it makes for an increased understanding of psychic reality and better perception of the external world, as well as for a greater synthesis between inner and external situations” (Ibid., 14, 44). This association between ‘moral character’ and perception resembles the relationship between “moral virtue” and perception in Aristotle’s ethical philosophy. Cf. his claim that “each state of character has its own ideas of the [beautiful] and the pleasant, and perhaps the good man differs from others most by seeing the truth in each class of things, being as it were the norm and measure of them” (Aristotle 1998, 59).

flourishing of everyone) and relations (comparable to Aristotle's ideas of "justice" and true "friendship") of "universally developed individuals" in "an advanced phase of communist society"; his sublation of the idea that "reason" is 'at work' in human history and that it is through a process of "estrangement" that it takes the form of self-conscious subjectivity; his idea that capitalism in particular is a necessary stage in this teleological development of "self-conscious reason" because the "passions" of the capitalists establish a mode of production which is instrumental in the development of the science and technology objectified in the productive forces of social labour and the "integral development" of wage-labourers; and his idea that the creation of the revolutionary subject takes place fundamentally through "estrangement" and "revolutionary practice" which, aside from the consciousness of their revolutionary role, develops the productive and ethical capacities required for the revolutionary reorganization of social life. A firm grasp of these aspects of his philosophy and their interconnection is essential for a coherent interpretation of his idea of revolutionary subjectivity. This dissertation has challenged mistaken vanguardist interpretations of Marx's idea of revolutionary subjectivity and ultimately his idea itself on the grounds that it is inconsistent and undertheorized.

Rearticulating elements of Marx's thought about "estrangement" and human subjectivity with Husserl's phenomenology and Freudian psychoanalysis (and Klein's revision of it) is a fruitful starting point for moving beyond the limitations of Marx's social philosophy while retaining and advancing the insights of it. In his assessments of the class struggle Marx took account of forms of "estrangement" and irrationality that are *not* 'self-transcending', even though they remained inadequately explored in his work. This can be explained in part by the fact that, from the perspective of his social philosophy, "estrangement" plays a necessary role in the

development of freedom and humanity is depicted as its own enemy throughout this process.⁷⁴⁰

However, without an adequate theory of the subjectivity at the basis of our life-practice, his work unavoidably fell short of explaining “to the world its own acts” and putting “political problems into the self-conscious human form” for the “mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself.”⁷⁴¹

*“If to be human is to suffer we are not human to suffer only
this is why I think so often, these days, of the great river
of this meaning that goes forward between banks of herbs and weeds
and animals that graze and slake their thirst and people that sow and reap
and even of great tombs and small dwellings of the dead.
This flowing that follows its course and is not so different from human blood
or from human eyes when they gaze fixedly and without fear into their own hearts...”*⁷⁴²

⁷⁴⁰ This, of course, is already a component of the progressive Hegelian tradition in which his thought is situated. Cf. Hegel’s claim that “Spirit is at war with itself; it has to overcome itself as its most formidable obstacle” (Hegel 1956, 55).

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., 214.

⁷⁴² From “An Old Man On The River Bank” by George Seferis (Seferis 2016, 113).

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